

## The Upper Room Congregation's Handbook

This Handbook is a footnote on the vision of John Wycliffe

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Copywrite Joseph L. Foreman

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A word:

This version is in need of editing. I am working on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Draft but felt it was far enough along to send out. Do not hesitate to contact me (I am on Facebook) with changes, or redline and send it to me virtual or snail doesn't matter. (2304 US 70 HWY Swannanoa NC 28778) The larger structural issues are important, getting topics into the proper chapter, getting chapters in the right order, eliminating polemic, cuteness etc. is a good thing. Above all a simpler version for people who never took seriously many of the practices of the past 2,000 years which we are addressing here, and all they need is a simple positive statement of the matter.

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## I. JESUS CHRIST, THE KING AND HEAD OF THE CHURCH:

- A. Government rests upon the shoulders of Jesus Christ, whose name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace;
  - 1. of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end;
  - 2. He sits upon the throne of David to order and establish His kingdom with judgment and justice from henceforth, even forever.<sup>1</sup>
- B. God the Father gave all power to Him in heaven and in earth:<sup>2</sup>
  - 1. Raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand;<sup>3</sup>
  - 2. Raised Him far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come;<sup>4</sup>
  - 3. Made all things His footstool;<sup>5</sup>
  - 4. Gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all;<sup>6</sup>
  - 5. And in Him holds all things together in creation.<sup>7</sup>
- C. He ascended far above all heavens, that He might fill all things,
  - 1. He received gifts for His Bride the Church, and<sup>8</sup>
  - 2. He gave them hearts of flesh taking away their hearts of stone.
  - 3. He wrote on their heart His law as He himself the 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam is the Law-Word of God made flesh, the pattern for His new people as Adam was to be with God's Law-word written on His heart.
  - 4. To His New Creation, He gave all gifts and callings necessary for the edification of His Church;<sup>9</sup>
  - 5. And with the Father, sent the Holy Spirit for the perfecting of His saints making them sufficient for all things to be self-directed from the heart, fearing no wind that might blow them about.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 9:6-7

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:18

<sup>3</sup> Daniel 7:13; Acts 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 1.

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 8:7; Daniel 2:44-45; 7:13-14; 26-27; Psalm 110.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel 7:13-14 & 7:26-27; Eph 1:20-23.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 1:1-4; Colossians 1:17.

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 4.

<sup>9</sup> Romans 12:1-8; Ephesians 4; I Corinthians 13-14.

<sup>10</sup> John 1; 14:12-18; 16:5-15; Eph 4:10-13.

- D. Jesus, is The Mediator, the Atonement, The Priest, The Prophet, The King, The Savior, and The Head of the Church, and therefore —
1. Contains in Himself, by way of eminency, all the gifts in His Church.
  2. He is Apostle, Teacher, Pastor, Minister, Bishop, Prophet and the only Lawgiver in Zion.
  3. It belongs to His Majesty from His throne of glory to rule and teach the Church through His Word and Spirit by the ministry of all His saints — which is utterly different from an organizational office which empowers a leadership-elite to bind God's helpless people who cannot act apart from submitting to their judgments.<sup>11</sup>
  4. He leads and empowers the victorious struggle of the Church against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms,<sup>12</sup> through which struggle the flesh and blood of the space-time history of the earth is transformed according to His plan laid from the foundation of the world.<sup>13</sup>
  5. Therefore, Christ grants His own authority to His people to declare, judge and execute the whole counsel of God in the midst of the congregation.<sup>14</sup> The exercise of this power is not in the private control of those who do these things professionally<sup>15</sup> by ordination, or on behalf of the congregation.<sup>16</sup>
  6. When the Lord and King of the Church says, "It is not to be so among you."<sup>17</sup> He explicitly rejects the authoritarian way the gentiles have always structured the authority and power of all their governing. Since the Fall they have governed by a select few of their great ones to rule over them.
  7. In its place the Lord and King of the Church establishes self-government, which has been God's plan from the beginning. The term is always used throughout this handbook as an abbreviation for, "the government of Spiritually mature adults, full of the Holy Spirit, self-governed according to the Law of God written on their recreated hearts of flesh which is the plan of God in

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel 7:18&27; Matthew 18:15-22; Ephesians 4:11.

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 4:11; 6:12.

<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 2:8-10.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 18:15-18 & 28:18-20; Psalm 22:22; 35:18; Hebrews 2:12; Acts 15;

<sup>15</sup> Acts 8:20.

<sup>16</sup> I Timothy 2:12.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 20:25; Mark 10:43; Luke 22:25.

Creation and has been reestablished in the incarnation, atonement and recreating work of Christ and in the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost.”

- E. The Good News of Jesus Christ is that the Lord of every aspect of creation from its raw existence to the infinite things which can be done to multiply its fruitful possibility has spoken His word to guide this great plan of dominion and through his incarnation, atoning and recreating death, resurrection and ruling ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit he has equipped and enabled His people to transform every aspect of earth and society throughout history.
1. By contrast, “Gospel” has been for the last 200 years limited to,
    - a. The least one must to know to be saved?
    - b. The least one can do to remain saved?
    - c. Holiness is only defined by how we protect ourselves from infection from the surrounding culture rather than how to infect it.
    - d. Cultural impact is reduced to things we can incorporate from the surrounding culture and still be “saved.”
    - e. Application of the Gospel to all creation is condemned as the new legalism.
  2. In effect, the Culture is compared to a diet, a sinking ship and a threat, or a neutral blessing. Salvation is the question: “What is the least we can eat to live?” And “How much of the ship can I take with me and still float in the life boat or life vest?”<sup>18</sup>
    - a. Instead Scripture tells us “The ship is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof”<sup>19</sup> and his purpose for us is not only to transform the culture on the ship, but to transform the ship itself into a glorious reality that would be unrecognizable to people who think of boats as we think of them today.<sup>20</sup>
    - b. The Gospel is the good news that you are transformed as the first fruits of God’s plan to transform every square inch of the planet, socially and technologically through your ministry as part of the ministry Jesus Christ through time. The Church is the seed bed or hot bed of His plan.<sup>21</sup>
    - c. A word to those who build monuments to the prophets of 200-400, 1000-1300, 1500-1700: If what you preach with all of its sophistication and claim to Know the final truth of God’s word and apply it to all things, does not preach

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<sup>18</sup> Jeremiah 20:32-40.

<sup>19</sup> Psalm 24:1-3; I Corinthians 10:26

<sup>20</sup> Habbakkuk 2:14; Isaiah 8.

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 1:16-18; Ephesians 2:9-10.

the victory of the Gospel in the space-time history which began in Genesis 1-4, then you are leaches on the body of the bride of Christ, and a dead weight; one more curiosity caged in the secular zoo our society has become through your ministry which robbed the Gospel of its relevance to the space-time reality we live in.

F. Some terms to clarify for usage: As used throughout the rest of this Handbook

1. **Gospel** — is the glorious hope of creation, the rich banquet of the Law-Word of God made flesh, served for you, never the starvation diet on a sinking boat prevalent in evangelical and reformed circles. The Government of Christ which we set forth here for the Church is the government which in time will transform all the ways anything is done in the earth.
2. **Church** — Has two technical meanings which context should make clear but at other times it helps to use the specific reference:
  - a. *Church*: Universal (all believers through all time) or Militant (All believers alive at any one time.) These are all who identify as Christian or are part of groups that identify Christian. They believe that the man Jesus is God and died to both save us for eternity and enable us to make a difference in the world we live in now. This identification can be true and valid for all theological purposes, but it requires no specific identification, association, covenanting, joining etc. with any organized group, nor does it guarantee eternal salvation which is beyond the scope of identifying one way or the other by any external means. There is no formal or informal government structure of association of what is often termed the Church.
  - b. *Congregation, fellowship, denomination, local church, the body*: These indicate the organizational bodies of Christians who gather and govern their association with different rules of order, procedures for discipline, theological nuances and doctrines, ethical and social practices and liturgical expressions.
  - c. *Leaders*: Priests, elders, bishops, overseers, primates, Cardinals, “arch-” versions of the preceding, etc.. There are many names for the people who are in charge of the organized “churches.” But all Christian organizations draw from the same Bible to define their tasks and role. “Leader” keeps the discussion out of the particular nuances though elder is the preferred alternative.

## II. THE WORD OF GOD ORDAINS, DEFINES, SANCTIFYS AND PROTECTS HIS CONGREGATION

- A. God's people are those who are created and sustained by The Holy Spirit speaking through the word, correcting errors that at any given time plague the ministry and peace of His people. God's word and Spirit continue to correct and refine His people in the Truth as they grow in Grace and maturity through space-time history until His return.
  - 1. Doctrinally the Church has always declared its dependence on the Sufficiency and Efficacy of Scripture and its dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup>
  - 2. But in actual practice the Church governs itself with the authoritarian, top down power of Priests, Bishops and Elders who, through their control of the sacraments, worship, teaching and doctrine, have maintained the purity of the Faith, the protection of the faithful, and have sifted the true from the false over the millennia.
  - 3. Authoritarian government is no more responsible for whatever growth the Church has had than the Pharaohs were responsible for the rise and the fall of the Nile. For three millennia they went out each spring to perform the Nile-Arise ritual, and then a month later returned to perform the Nile-Recede ritual. They proved through historical fact that it is they who control the Nile. The true cause, the rains on the Upper Nile, is the actual force for which the Pharaohs took credit. In the same way it is the word of God sifting out His people and establishing them sometimes through but more often despite the elders who like the Pharaohs believe that their sacramental, doctrinal and ritual control of God's people and their labors as judges in church courts are the source of the advance of the Church in the world<sup>23</sup> and in fact have ignored the fact that ordained men have been the source of 95% of the error in the Church as well.
  - 4. God will not share his Glory with another; nor will He allow His Word and Spirit to be contained, and ordered by human organizations.<sup>24</sup> He discipled His elders to be free of all extraneous table cleaning, administration and judicial distractions.<sup>25</sup> He told them that their only passion would be to disciple the congregation by making the Truth of God's

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<sup>22</sup> Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8.

<sup>23</sup> Jeremiah 23:32-40.

<sup>24</sup> Acts 8:19-21.

<sup>25</sup> Luke 12:13-14; Acts 6:4.

word clear, applying it to their lives through prayer, teaching, example, and the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup> Their ministry has only one end purpose — to create a self-controlled<sup>27</sup> body of people who do the work of the ministry as opposed to the elite leader, submissive follower that the congregation of God has become.<sup>28</sup>

5. Christ commanded his leaders to move only in the power of the Holy Spirit;<sup>29</sup> Peter taught that The Holy Spirit cannot be controlled through the laying on of hands,<sup>30</sup> and to reject the power of human organizational titles and offices which control the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup>
- B. The transforming Grace of Jesus Christ writing His word on His people's new heart,<sup>32</sup> and the work of the Holy Spirit speaking through that word,<sup>33</sup> differentiates God's congregation from the world and from the world's forms of government.<sup>34</sup> Where this commitment to God's word exists, all doctrines and governments over time can and will be refined and corrected wherever they are mistaken or misapplied.<sup>35</sup> Where this commitment to God's both God's written word as final for all creation, and His transforming work to apply that word in the center of each Christian's being does not exist, instead of transforming the world, the people of God will soon be shaped by the world and become indistinguishable from it.
  1. God's word is a complete, self-consistent and self-interpreting word. It needs no other source, authority or proof than the affirmation of the Holy Spirit;
  2. No one can understand God's word apart from the Holy Spirit speaking through it and opening their eyes, ears, mind and heart;<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> John 13:12-17 & 21:15-19; Luke 22:25-27; Acts 6:4; I Corinthians 2:1-5; I Peter 5:3.

<sup>27</sup> II Timothy 1:7.

<sup>28</sup> Ephesians 4:7-16.

<sup>29</sup> John 14:17; Zechariah 4:6; Acts 1:1-3.

<sup>30</sup> Acts 8:19.

<sup>31</sup> Exodus 20:6; Matthew 23:8-12.

<sup>32</sup> Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 11:20 & 36:26; John 15:7-10; Hebrews 8:10 & 10:16.

<sup>33</sup> Jeremiah 31:34; Ezekiel 11:19 & 36:26; John 14:16,26 & 15:26 & 16:13; Hebrews 8:11

<sup>34</sup> John 14:16-18;

<sup>35</sup> John 14:17; Matthew 28:18-19.

<sup>36</sup> John 6:63-65.

3. It is complete, unique and preserved to our day from Genesis to Revelation, nothing is to be added to or taken from it;<sup>37</sup>
  4. True doctrine is that which is found in every verse of Scripture whose meaning is self-consistent, such as the Doctrines of Scripture, the Trinity, the dual nature of Christ, the Creation, the Fall, Man, God, Atonement, Law, Grace, Providence, God's plan to transform the earth in Space time History, etc..
  5. All Scripture proclaims Jesus Christ, His work and His plan for all time because Jesus is God, the Son, slain before the foundation of the world of which He is its creative architect and redeemer; His incarnation is the purpose and reason for all things;<sup>38</sup>
  6. This sufficiency of Scripture in no way contradicts the fact that God's revelation to us has not ceased. It is because His finished written word is the measure of all things that anyone believes or says, that we are confident that God's word tries the spirits making it possible for the spiritual man to judge in its light, all other judgments, gifts, prophesies teachings or revelations.
  7. Because His Word is all He needs to accomplish His purpose,<sup>39</sup> God has no need of human leaders empowered by Human organizations to impose their idea of discipline to winnow His people as if either God's congregation is impotent to act for themselves or too ignorant to pass judgment in His name.<sup>40</sup>
- C. Where these things are a firm conviction it follows, that Scripture, not the interpretation or decrees of men, is the final court of appeal for all thoughts, doctrines, philosophies, controversies, freedoms, governments and worship. Therefore, we can live confidently in the knowledge that it is not the Elder's job to sift God's people for Him, but rather they conquer by "the word of their testimony, the blood of the lamb, and that they do not love their lives unto death."<sup>41</sup>
- D. The Congregations of the Church are not devoid of leadership, nor of the ability to discipline itself and pass judgment simply because the Lord did not establish an office

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<sup>37</sup> Matthew 5:18; Revelation 22:18-19.

<sup>38</sup> Luke 24:25-27; Revelation 13:8.

<sup>39</sup> Isaiah 55:11; Psalm 19.

<sup>40</sup> Ephesians 1 & 4:11; I Corinthians 5; Jeremiah 31; Hebrews 8 & 10; Matthew 18:15-20.

<sup>41</sup> Revelation 12:11

of final judge to be held by a few leaders to exercise that judgment,<sup>42</sup> (whether they call themselves priests or merely representatives of the Church is not relevant to the truth of how they function.)<sup>43</sup> That judgment resides in the right and obligation of the individual Christian to judge all things and be judged by nothing,<sup>44</sup> and for the congregation as a whole to apply corporate judgment when it is called for, which this handbook shows how and why this can be.<sup>45</sup>

1. The leaders' authority to judge and bind people is not the result of his office, or ordination. The leaders' power to judge rests in the fact that the Leaders are Christians. There is no office or institutional authority or power in the Church beyond those powers accessible to "the least of these my brethren" which includes leaders.
2. Those who lead are not especially empowered to control the Holy Spirit, or to control another member's standing in the faith, or membership in the body of Christ, or access to any sacrament or blessing the Church has to offer beyond what any Christian is empowered to do, or say, by the Spirit speaking through the Word.<sup>46</sup>
3. Though Scripture does not grant such status to leaders, it is not its silence on this topic that requires God's people to resist granting priestly powers to their leaders. There are at least five positive reasons why Scripture calls God's people to reject special controllers in the Church even though all the history of the world from Genesis 3:16 on; and all the history of the Church, except that covered by the New Testament; tell us that it is impossible to govern an organization without authoritative controllers in the office of control.
  - a. **Reason #1** — Jesus Christ in Matthew 18:15-22 empowers the Congregation as the final court of appeal.

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<sup>42</sup> Matthew 20:25; Mark 10:43; Luke 22:25; I Peter 5:3.

<sup>43</sup> 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:9-10. Priest is as priest does. Reformed and Baptist elders alike function as every inch a Roman or Orthodox priest in so far as they believe they exclusively holds the power to control worship, discipline, sacraments and teaching.

<sup>44</sup> Revelation 2:2; I Corinthians 2:15; I John 4:1.

<sup>45</sup> Matthew 18:15-18; See *Chapter III, The Final Court of Appeal* and *Chapter V, the Growth and Division of the Church*. Luke 1:34; Luke 18:27. Throughout this Handbook, the presupposition is that Jesus said it is possible, His disciples did it, therefore it is for us to learn and follow not conclude that what is impossible for God.

<sup>46</sup> Acts 8:19; John 3.

The congregation is not limited to passing judgment as a single organization or needing to authorize committees to judge with authority, but can pass binding judgments in ad hoc groups as small as 2 or 3 and even as individuals as when Peter passed judgment on Ananias and Paul on Hymenaeus and Alexander with no record of ecclesiastical empowerment or approval. Yes, this is absurd to the Gentile or unregenerate understanding of political reality — to the mind that knows neither the Spirit nor law of God. Therefore, Christ calls us to reject this mind. Paul calls us to have this mind renewed.<sup>47</sup>

- b. **Reason #2** — With all the problems in Corinth, Paul never appeals to elders in any way to solve them, nor does he attribute them to a lack of elders or their proper functioning. Most notably are these 7 examples of issues the Church since then unanimously agrees are the special jurisdiction of elders and priests, all except Paul that is —
  - i. Concerning the Lord's Table as well as standing in the faith, no elder is called upon to fence or examine anyone. Only self-examination is required to evaluate worthiness. The Lord is set forth as fully able to fence and discipline his Table without priestly control granted to leadership-men;<sup>48</sup>
  - ii. To resolve disputes, any member is superior to any pagan judge and fit to judge in the Church;<sup>49</sup>
  - iii. Decency and order is not established by an elder empowered to control the events of the gathering to eat, conduct business and worship, rather each member is appealed to, to recognize each other;<sup>50</sup>
  - iv. No elder judges sin, the congregation does. Paul joins his Apostolic judgment to the congregation's in the matter of incest to judge the man who the congregation should have judged for themselves, long before Paul ever heard the matter.
  - v. Argument from Silence — Search the two letters and underline the role of the elder in all verses where Paul prescribes one. Note where you thought the elder should have an exclusive role, but Paul didn't.
  - vi. Argument from positive command and example — Now, underline the responsible agent Paul appeals to in any situation formerly thought to belong exclusively

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<sup>47</sup> Matthew 20:25; Ephesians 1; I Corinthians 2:9-16; Romans 12:1-2

<sup>48</sup> I Corinthians 11:27-31; II Corinthians 13:5; Galatians 6:4; Romans 14:4.

<sup>49</sup> I Corinthians 6:1-6.

<sup>50</sup> I Corinthians 12.

in the jurisdiction of an elder. The only role an elder has is a role that is brought into the text by the commentator, not by the pen of Paul.<sup>51</sup>

- c. **Reason #3** — When instructing Timothy and Titus, not only does Paul does **NOT** give any instruction for tribunals to resolve problems, but the exact opposite, Paul instructs elders to solve all problems through attention to doctrine, character, service and love. Search all 3 books and see. Underline every way Paul instructs them to overcome sin, criticism, error and opposition in the Church.
  - d. **Reason #4** — Though members of the congregation are on occasion admonished to submit to elders, there is no corresponding empowerment of elders to enforce that submission. Elders are, in fact, told by Jesus and Peter to reject this power characteristic of Gentile government.<sup>52</sup>
  - e. **Reason #5** — The congregation is admonished not to submit to or join anyone even an Apostle or an Angel from heaven where they are in error.<sup>53</sup>
4. Peter is the classic example of how it is his affirmation of the Truth that makes him an Apostle to be obeyed, and his rejection of the Truth that makes him an Apostle to be disobeyed, challenged and corrected. His Apostolic anointing, appointment, ordination, even masculinity, or gifting does not grant him the status of “one to be submitted to.” This fact with Matthew 18:17 confirms that it is the judgment of each member of the congregation that is final, not the judgment of an “officer” of an organization called “elders of the Church” while their court is “in session.”
  5. The judgment of the congregation does not bind the one or the faction judged, though it may separate them from the congregation and may define the points at which the congregation is agreed. It may be that the minority or the sole advocate of a position or practice is the one defending the truth, such as Athanasius when he stood against the world, or Paul when he alone stood up to the judaizers in Galatia, led by Peter. He stands or falls on God’s word even if he is removed from that particular fellowship. He is free to establish a work in which the Holy Spirit demonstrates

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<sup>51</sup> Ephesians 1:17-19.

<sup>52</sup> Matthew 20:25; Mark 10:43; Luke 22:25; I Peter 5:3.)

<sup>53</sup> Galatians 1:6-9 & 2:11; Revelation 2:2.

- that he is correct. If he is not, God is perfectly capable of dealing with him over time, and will.<sup>54</sup>
6. To summarize — The Scripture does not give control of the worship service, the exclusive power to teach, or who has access to baptism or the Lord’s table to officers of the Church however they might be selected, elected, appointed or whose hands are laid on them. This is how government works in all other organizations which Jesus called “Gentile”.<sup>55</sup> By contrast, these things are given to all God’s people who are members of Christ jointly and severally.<sup>56</sup> These powers are not kept safe in their behalf by an ecclesiastical Guardian ad litem . . . Unless, and this is an important exception, the congregation are children unable to handle the meat of the word, not yet come of age, in need of authoritarian guardians. Then the authoritarian arrangement is appropriate.
  7. The belief that a congregation today is incapable of resisting anarchy, heresy and sin if there are no authoritative elders or pastors is an admission of the failure of authoritarian elders to disciple their congregation to maturity in Christ as defined by Ephesians Chapters 1 and 4.
- E. The true authority and power of the Church and those ordained to lead it, is the authority and power of the Holy Spirit. The ever-present temptation is to replace what only the Holy Spirit can do with Authoritarian governments of Elders who rise up to replace the call and ministry of the Holy Spirit with their various tests and educational programs and votes designed to produce a qualified leader whether the Holy Spirit qualifies him or not.
- F. The elders/bishops/pastors/teachers/prophets of the Church inherit the Apostolic task to disciple the Church which is carried out by the power of the Holy Spirit to speak through the ministry of the Word, prayer and example.<sup>57</sup> Their sole undistracted passion is to disciple unto spiritual, ethical and judicial maturity congregations capable of passing all such judgments and performing all actions that since the fall into sin have been thought to be the special province and powers of the leaders.

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<sup>54</sup> This introduces the issue which *Chapter V, The Growth and Division of the Church* explains more fully.

<sup>55</sup> I Timothy 2:5; Mark 10:42-45; Acts 8:19-23.

<sup>56</sup> I Corinthians 12:12-21 & 6:19-20 & 3:16; I Peter 2:5; Matthew 18:15-18.

<sup>57</sup> Acts 6:4; I Peter 5:3.

1. Through prayer, the ministry of the word and sound example they are to passionately devote themselves to producing a congregation characterized by ethical and judicially mature love, hope, and mutual submission to one another,<sup>58</sup> of which they are exemplary examples of submission and service, confident that God's transforming Grace, the work of the Holy Spirit and ministry of the word dwelling richly in each believer will reveal, sanctify and establish His people over time, each person governing their own life according to God's law written on their recreated hearts.<sup>59</sup>
2. Scripture will always find and form God's people. It is the grid which sifts them out through all mankind, throughout the millennia. The elder's task is not to be the examiner and judge of God's people as if he is the door to the sheepfold; nor is he to control God's people with the power to control their standing in Christ, their worship, teaching and the sacraments. The power to control these things in the life of the Church is by definition the power of priestly mediation it is the power of the people of God.<sup>60</sup> Rather He is to faithfully teach God's word in season and out. He is to faithfully contrast it with error, but not erect himself as a court to pass judgment on those who are in error except to pronounce their error, pray against it, warn them of it, argue and perhaps if no other way can be found to convince them, and the matter is serious enough, he like any Christian brings them before the congregation whom he has discipled, confident that God will grant them sound judgment.
3. The only true Schism in the congregation is between those who affirm the word of God as final authority and those who do not.

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<sup>58</sup> Ephesians 5; I Corinthians 13; I Peter 1:22; John 4:7-8.

<sup>59</sup> Ephesians 1 and 4; II Corinthians 13:14; Acts 20:28

<sup>60</sup> Galatians 3:28; I Peter 2:5.

### III. THE FINAL COURT OF APPEAL

- A. The Scriptures as written and preserved by God are final. They are the dividing line between a people whom God promised would remain faithful to Him and transform the earth, and one that will in time become indistinguishable from the world and be removed with it.<sup>61</sup>
  - B. God alone is the final judge and Lord of the Conscience. He judges each person justly for how they handled the issues of their faith and life holding them responsible.
1. The individual conscience is for that individual, the final judge for the interpretation, application and obedience to Scripture. Each believer is held accountable for what they believe and cannot be made just or absolved of guilt if they believe or do the wrong thing at the command or influence of others. Otherwise the believer could argue, "This elder that you gave me, he gave me the fruit and I ate." and be held faultless. There is only one atonement for sin. The believer stands alone before the justification or condemnation of God, "*... every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.*"<sup>62</sup>
  2. Being the final judge does not mean the individual believer is correct. It means that he is the only one who is responsible for his decision. There is no other name under heaven whereby he can be saved from his sin even if he commits it at the direction of others.
  3. Where Christians differ in belief, expression or practice of their faith, they have a responsibility to agree where they can, be charitable where they cannot and to separate peacefully where unity of faith and practice are impossible to attain.
  4. These steps are not to be taken lightly. They should not be taken in haste, anger or strife. They are part of contending for the faith confident that the Holy Spirit will sort out the difference.
  5. It is no small thing to submit when he should have taken a stand. This is because someone believing or doing the wrong thing is not made righteous simply because he was submitting to authority whether to husband, elder or king.

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<sup>61</sup> Genesis 3:15; Revelation 2-3.

<sup>62</sup> Deuteronomy 24:16; Jeremiah 31:29:30; Ezekiel 18:20.

6. Likewise, it is no small thing to take a stand when he should have submitted. This is because rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.
  7. It is because of this fact that authorities cannot compel the assent of the individual believer. Ultimately all stand before God and must give account. It is this reliance on the Holy Spirit and God's word that makes it possible to contend intensely and thoroughly yet without bitterness, confident that the outcome is the Lord's, so they can work through issues until they are resolved or ways peaceably part and final trust and appeal made to God to sustain, perfect, or rid.
- C. God's law in general and the New Testament in particular presents the world with the amazing concept that humanly speaking, final authority is not lodged in the mediation or atonement of a specialized priesthood, or in the traditions of the fathers, but in each unmediated believer who stands naked directly before God,<sup>63</sup> fully at the mercy of the only mediator whose word is binding — indeed who is called the Word of God.<sup>64</sup>
1. If a special group of leaders has power to declare guilt because their word was rejected or declare innocence because their word was submitted to they would be both the de facto mediator of grace, and the one who can atone for sins, as long as the sins are committed in submission to their will.
  2. Jesus affirms the authority of the leaders to lead and be treated with serious respect.
  3. He denies that trusting in their error absolves the one who trusts them of personal guilt, otherwise he would not say that their followers are twice as fit for hell.<sup>65</sup>
- D. All are held individually and personally liable for their beliefs and actions because each person is unmediated by any other believer or authority in respect to their responsibility to understand, believe, evaluate and act on the truth. No one can

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<sup>63</sup> 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; Revelation 5:10; Exodus 20 The Decalogue is given to "you" singular, personally by God, "Me". It is not first delivered to the "authorities" to compel third party obedience. The law was delivered as the shadow of the light of ethical Truth, Jesus Christ and his writing it on the heart of His people.

<sup>64</sup> I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 1:1-4; 4:11-16, John 1

<sup>65</sup> Matthew 23:15.

- do this for the individual.<sup>66</sup>
- E. The Divine Obligation of Private Judgment is another way of saying, “God alone is Lord of the conscience.” He has made it free from any doctrines or commandments of men which are in any respect contrary to the Word of God.
  - F. This is the most radical doctrine of the Reformation — It is the statement that each person is responsible to know the truth<sup>67</sup> from God speaking through His Word and applying it to each heart and situation. That each person will be personally judged based on their understanding and acceptance of it, not on their faith in and agreement with other authorities. These authorities cannot cover the believer’s sin who trusts in them where they are wrong. There is only one atonement, only one mediator.
    - 1. This idea separates those who have their power, meaning and place granted to them by their approval from an authoritative hierarchy of men, and
    - 2. those who gain their power, meaning and place from who they are in Christ.
    - 3. Luther, Calvin, and later Reformers, Owen, JC Ryle, Alexander Hodge and all other reformation thinkers strenuously taught in strikingly clear and bold terms this doctrine of private judgment. It is not clear if they fully realized the acid this doctrine represents to all theories of Church government that place unique power in a central command which regardless of theology, will in time be driven by the logic of their office and power to require submission of believers as an essential component of saving faith.
- a. If the reformers are correct — and the entire reformation was based on this idea — final judgment belongs to the individual and not to any priest, elder, counsel, congregation, judge, king, or Pope. The individual has the final say on what he will believe and do and it is a self maledictory judgment he passes — each will be personally judged based on it. Without this doctrine there is no doctrine of personal responsibility, merely the responsibility to submit to, obey, agree with whomever is in authority and trust in them for mediation and absolution before God’s throne.
  - b. This is quite different from saying that the individual is correct in his final judgment, much less that God will

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<sup>66</sup> Jeremiah 31:29-30; Matthew 25 especially vv29-46.

<sup>67</sup> Isaiah 54:13; John 6:45.

- accept that final judgment. The individual can be as wrong or right as any authority.
- c. But only the individual is responsible for their own judgment concerning God's Word, what it means, how it applies and what they do about what they know.
4. All government to be godly must respect and nurture this authority of self-government in Christ and disciple each person to judge maturely, to judge truly and to act faithfully with integrity, not merely to follow the crowd even if it is a crowd of leaders.<sup>68</sup>
- a. A fundamental principle of this Handbook on Church Government is the inability of the elders to rule over the congregation by imposing discipline or requiring them to interpret the Bible their way. It is a fundamental encroachment into Christ's final mediation.
  - b. The powers of the leaders in the Church will be taken up below VII. THE AUTHORITY AND POWER OF LEADERS.
  - c. What follows is for leaders who will disciple mature congregations, capable of conflict and resolution, not congregations of self-willed children needing an authoritarian master.<sup>69</sup> How congregations can do this without themselves replacing the mediation and atonement of Christ is discussed in Chapter V GROWTH AND DIVISION IN THE BODY OF CHRIST..<sup>70</sup>
  - d. Whether in the home, the state or the Church, submission commanded by God is to be only given to the leader, "as unto the Lord," or "in Christ."
5. Scripture Requires unconstrained unity among those who are obligated to do and believe only those things that they believe are right.<sup>71</sup> Every passage calling for love, is the statement that unconstrained unity in Christ is not only possible, but will be the reality of history.
- a. External authoritarian force is therefore appealed to as necessarily the only thing that can force a measure of unity. This appeal only underlines the fact that it is a false appearance of unity only. The choice is not between Authoritarian unity and Anarchy. The reality is, both are

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<sup>68</sup> Ephesians 4:11, Matthew 28:17-18.

<sup>69</sup> Ephesians 4:11; Matthew 18:17-18; Galatians 2; Matthew 16:13-23;

<sup>70</sup> Matthew 18:15-20.

<sup>71</sup> Ephesians 1; 4; 5; I Corinthians 1; John 17.

anarchy. One gives the illusion of unity, and some of its benefits, just as anarchy gives the illusion of freedom along with some of its benefits.

- b. In reality, neither solves the basic problem which is a heart problem. Neither unity nor freedom can be imposed from the outside but must come from the heart. The heart Scripture claims Christ transforms and dwells in and writes His law on.

G. The New Covenant is not limited to Authoritarian remedies granted by God at the fall to prevent humanity from falling into hopeless chaos.<sup>72</sup>

- 1. The Prophets foresaw a day in which God's people would themselves be transformed into people who could govern themselves freely.<sup>73</sup>
- 2. The fundamental doctrines of the faith define the work of salvation as creating a people capable of self-government
  - i. The Incarnation to show the True Man, self-governed by God's law is possible.
  - ii. The Atonement to first justify and forgive, and then to transform each believer from the heart making them capable of self-government.<sup>74</sup>
  - iii. The Ascension into Heaven from where Christ personally reigns in all the earth uniting his people.<sup>75</sup>
  - iv. The giving of the Holy Spirit who writes God's law on the believer's newly recreated heart so he is not left without Word or Guide to govern himself in agreement with all others who have God's word written on their heart.<sup>76</sup>
- 3. The achievable goal of the Christian life is not perfection, but it is to be sufficiently spiritually mature in Christ, to be self-governed by the reality of the transformation which Christ has accomplished which rejects the use of outside force to falsely give the impression of a unity that if it were truly there, would not require that external force.
- 4. It is the unregenerate mind outside of Christ which believes that only the strength of the central planner can force the appearance of unity where there is none.

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<sup>72</sup> Genesis 3:2&16.

<sup>73</sup> Numbers 11:25-29; Jeremiah 31:33-34; Ezekiel 11:19-20 & 36:26.

<sup>74</sup> Romans 5:1; 3:24; Ephesians 2:28-9; II Corinthians 5:17-21.

<sup>75</sup> Daniel 7:13-14&27; Psalm 110; Colossians 1; Ephesians 1 & 4; Philippians 1; John 14-17)

<sup>76</sup> Jeremiah 31:34; John 14-17.

5. What self-government means is that the final human court of appeal by which the individual stands or falls is what the individual judges to be true concerning the word of God and what they do to obey and be bound by what they have judged.<sup>77</sup>
- H. This sort of Ephesians 1&4 and II Corinthians 2-4 believer forms mature congregations who are capable of resolving most disagreements, but when there is a sufficiently serious impasse, they make their next growing division one that separates out the conflicting group or individual to establish its own congregation and trusts God to judge between them, as will be spelled out in Chapter V.<sup>78</sup>
  1. The goal of all Biblical government is to minimize the external coercion; to respect men and women who discern for themselves according to God's law what is right and good and act on it.<sup>79</sup>
  2. The shape of all government and its powers will always reflect the maturity and therefore the capability of those governed to govern themselves.
  3. Therefore, only free self-governing people who have proven that they can get along like adults with others without violating God's law will successfully create free governments ruled increasingly by those exercising the power of the "least of these".<sup>80</sup>
  4. Until then, the specific limitations on the powers of government will be in direct proportion of the maturity of God's people to live lives self-directed by God's law.<sup>81</sup>
- I. Spiritually mature congregations and elders will not need authoritarian government to discipline God's people.
  1. They will function in authoritarian governments smoothly and in most cases mistakenly credit the harmony to authority of the leaders rather than the freedom in Christ of new Creatures honored by the leaders.
  2. This arrangement will not be a problem until leaders attempt to violate the final authority of the believers (to function as mediators) at which point they will all discover that Spiritually Mature People are only properly governed by systems of government that nurture and honor the Holy Spirit speaking through His word written on their heart.

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<sup>77</sup> I Corinthians 2:11-15; 4:3; Galatians 1:8; II Timothy 1:7.

<sup>78</sup> Genesis 13:9, 31:49; I Samuel 24:12

<sup>79</sup> Ephesians 6:6 Paul takes coercion out of the most coercive of all human institutions without removing the authority of the owner.

<sup>80</sup> Luke 22:25ff

<sup>81</sup> Matthew 9:29.

#### IV. CHRIST REGULATES HIS WORSHIP.

- A. The Last Supper and the Events of the Upper Room were the last worship service of the Old Covenant and the first worship service of the New. New Testament worship grew organically out of the Highest Feast of the Hebrew Liturgical calendar, the Passover. In this service Jesus transformed the shadows of the memory of Israel's deliverance from slavery into the New Covenant Worship of God's people who live the resurrected reality of free men and women delivered from slavery to all authority but His, written on their hearts. In this feast it was His blood that was about to be sprinkled on the lintel and door frame their hearts — The New Covenant House of God which you now are.
- B. The events at the Last Supper in the Upper Room are the guide which regulate Christian worship, not by slavish ritual, but by how God's people dwell with God and each other in the body of Christ.<sup>82</sup> The Corporate gathering of God's people reflects the things that Jesus and the Apostles found important enough to guide their worship. They are the regulative principle of Christian Worship.
- C. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment, "You shall make no graven images nor bow down to them nor worship them." Is a general principle of worship which we find in its purest form in the Upper Room at that Last Supper to be memorialized in all Christian worship.
  - 1. No method of worship in and of itself pleases God or forces His blessing or presence.<sup>83</sup> God the Father is seeking those who will worship in Spirit and in Truth, not impressive (or unimpressive) technique and form fit only to become an idol of ritual.<sup>84</sup>
  - 2. Almost any form of worship that does not incorporate sin can please God, but none require his blessing even if He blessed them in the past, even if they are otherwise beyond objection. Nothing can compel God's blessing.<sup>85</sup>
  - 3. No form of worship lacking the Spirit and Truth from the heart of the worshipper can be acceptable. Some ways of worshipping though blessed in the past will not continue in God's blessing, such as Samuel worshipping in the high places in Israel, or Abraham's willingness to engage in

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<sup>82</sup> I Corinthians 11:29

<sup>83</sup> Genesis 4

<sup>84</sup> John 4:23-24

<sup>85</sup> Genesis 4.

human sacrifice, or in a return to the Mosaic temple and purification system.

- D. The general application of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment to worship was that Jesus was not deterred by nor forbade any distraction or possibility that someone would fail to grasp what he said, or through distraction miss what God had planned for him to grasp.<sup>86</sup> Some specific examples of this are —
1. There was so much lack of focus in the discussion going around the upper room that they didn't even grasp who was going to betray Him when He told them directly, nor did most of them remember 3 chapters worth of material that only John recorded, and John apparently missed the argument over who was the greatest.
  2. So too, Jesus was not deterred or bothered by lack of focus in His listeners whether it was the crying children during a sermon, or arguing disciples carrying on and not paying attention to Him, even on the night of His betrayal and death. He was confident that the Holy Spirit and His Word would penetrate as necessary to accomplish His will in the earth in His Father's time. This too should be the confidence of God's leaders and people who should refrain from creating artificial aids to worship such as a stage, lighting, fixed seating, enforced silence, isolating one paid leader who controls or performs all the elements of worship and teaching. These are a few time honored bronze shield<sup>87</sup> examples of enforcing interest and focus (of course so others can pay better attention) to avoid distraction. In short nothing should be set up that would replace the gold of a person's desire from the heart to listen, engage and even lead in the events comprising the regular gathering of God's people.
  3. Different seating formats are more conducive to different outcomes, but none of them guarantee or make impossible a godly outcome. Jesus Himself was lying around on a low 8 inch couch for a good bit of that last worship service in the Upper Room including the institution of the "Lord's Supper." The rest of His disciples were sprawling there with Him, one so disorderly as to be lying with His head on Jesus' chest. At a critical point in the meeting, that disciple was receiving hand signals from Peter to ask Jesus a question. This must be pictured to grasp what doesn't

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<sup>86</sup> Matthew 13:9-16; Revelation 3:2; Matthew 13:13; Mark 4:12; Isaiah 6:9.

<sup>87</sup> I Kings 14:25-28.

matter to God when it comes to Christian worship and fellowship: a room full of people reclining (lying around) all shouting at once and John his face 6 inches from the Lord of the Universe as his head lay on his chest asking him, "Tell us who will betray you." This is not to show the congregation the best position to be in, or to advocate noise and confusion, but rather to show the utter irrelevance in Jesus' estimation of the position or demeanor of those involved in any gathering whether in the upper room or throughout His ministry. Jesus marked unexpected disruptions in his teaching and worship, (like the time they tried to throw Him off a cliff, or the storm in the boat interrupting his prayers, or being touched by a sick woman, or having a whore pour ointment on his feet in front of the Pharisees) by seizing the opportunity not by careful ritual exclusion of the possibility of interruption. We, even our elders, are Christians not snowflakes.

4. Jesus was most comfortable with an environment that was relaxed in general so people would focus on what seemed to them important when there was something of sufficient importance to make their attention worth their while. Whatever Christians do in their meetings that they think needs everyone's attention needs to be something worthy of their attention in and of itself, not artificially placed on the stage to give the appearance of worth regardless of value. Realize that God Himself was not bothered when His friends — the Apostles — didn't pay attention and missed things He was saying. So too, Christian worship should not be formed around artificial times of externally imposed total undistracted attention as if this is a value in and of itself to draw His people near to God.<sup>88</sup> The reality is, like that night, they are the temple of God. God is in their midst. As He draws their attention, as people perceive value in something happening, they should focus on it, and if what is said or sung or prayed or prophesied or disputed or eaten or drunk is sufficiently important, as many people will stop what they are doing and listen or participate appropriately as need to do so. This is how leadership rises naturally to the top. They are the ones whose activity stops people's mouths and arrests their attention. The servant is not greater than the master . . . even when it comes to designing worship.<sup>89</sup>
5. It is a freedom of ideas and spiritual values that God has

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<sup>88</sup> Colossians 2:20-23; I Timothy 4:8.

<sup>89</sup> John 13:16; 15:20; Job 29.

designed for His people in all they do, not merely in economics. This is how it works in worship and fellowship. It does not improve the situation to impose an artificial order from the top down which only confuses the understanding of the forces that are truly at work and can only lead to bad decisions in worship as in the marketplace.

6. This same tenor should mark true worship: that it is only as good as the heart of those involved is able to focus and attend to it. It is not improved by external rules, rituals and constraints and special actors that attempt to coerce that focus.<sup>90</sup>
  7. Such an environment of fellowship, worship and teaching, that is not cramped by time constraints, promotes a natural resistance to making the strength and success of the Church depend on the ability of organizers to organize and controllers to control. Such worship does not guarantee either the Spirit or Truth. Yet its form intrinsically resists the reduction of faith to ritual which violates the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment and by design it resists the rise of a priestly elder-elite. This said, nothing can overcome the immature desire of a congregation to be led by those who slap their faces and put a ring in their noses as a sign of submission to their authority in the Church.<sup>91</sup> This is how the immature are led.
  8. It is crucial to understand the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment here. It is not that Church is doing it wrong today and here is a set of rules to do it right so God can finally bless us. Adopting this or that structure will not make worship or the gathering or the teaching pleasing to God. Rather this is a discussion of how the surroundings of the gathering reflect the freedom of the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment or the bondage of trying to improve on it and creating ritual violations in our worship.
- E. Food is one aspect of the Upper Room and of the Church meetings in Acts which is consistent with all Old Covenant worship from the food offered at the Creation to Man<sup>92</sup> and then the two fruit trees in heart of the Garden to seal their covenant with God and from there on to the marriage feast of the lamb at the end of the story. Fellowship with God revolved around food. Whatever the ritual or teaching led by an expert that might be involved it did not get in the way of eating together.

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<sup>90</sup> Colossians 2:21-23; John 4:22-24; Galatians 5.

<sup>91</sup> I Corinthians 11:20.

<sup>92</sup> Genesis 1:28ff.

1. The characteristics of their service of worship were: Gather with everyone else who knows Jesus and eat a meal. In that environment, work through whatever needs working out, pray, sing, worship, teach, prophesy, rebuke, exhort, encourage and love everyone there and if needed, separated out new congregations.
  - a. The room could be filled with comfortable chairs possibly recliners like Jesus used, that can be pulled into any size grouping as needed, from two or three to the whole group at once to be addressed or sung to by one person. The very flexibility helps prevent the idea that Christians gather so one person can turn himself into the only person they need to listen to. Not even Jesus Himself organized by forcing anyone to listen or follow. People listened and followed because they wanted to, as long as they wanted to.<sup>93</sup>
  - b. The Upper Room design organically emphasizes that everyone needs to be at that point where they find everyone else worth listening to. They discern the Body.<sup>94</sup> Remembering the design will not guarantee that anyone cares about others, your design will clearly state what the designers decide is important.
2. At some point while eating, stop and remember last night, Jesus breaking the bread and drinking the wine of the New Covenant inviting his family<sup>95</sup> to eat and drink with Him at His table until He comes. It is God's table, not the Church's or the elders'. This is not a ritual needing correct performance by the right people to be a blessing. It is a regular practice that goes naturally with the meal, and should be repeated in faith to teach the purpose of the meal and the reality of grace in that moment. It is an opportunity to reflect on our sin and need for the righteousness of Christ. So though everyone is encouraged to examine themselves, the end result is not to decide whether or not to partake, but rather to partake in anticipation of whatever blessing or judgment God has in store at his table. The Church invites those who are commanded by God to come to Him which is all who call on the name of the Lord and those unable on their own to come whom He commands not to forbid but to provide for, His little ones, the lame, the halt the blind, the mentally handicapped, the elderly and the children.
3. The role of the elders in this is whole process at Corinth is

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<sup>93</sup> Mark 10:17-27; John 6 esp. vv 41&60; I John 2:19; Luke 9:57-62

<sup>94</sup> I Cor 11:29; I Cor 14

<sup>95</sup> Matthew 24:46-50.

most noticeable by the fact that there is none, yet the story of the drunks of Corinth is a flagship passage used to defend the authority of elders to control this practice which they inevitably turned into a ritual by their seizure of power over it. Anything not a ritual is useless to a priest and those who claim priestly powers.<sup>96</sup>

4. Throughout the time the Church gathers for fellowship the issues of life are discussed privately and where appropriate, corporately. There is singing and music, instruments for the gifted. People will listen to others say some hard things sometimes personally and privately other times corporately. Then they work it out, like iron sharpening iron, even needing to get everyone's attention so something serious can have the wisdom and judgment of all God's people. Everyone is helping each other sort through all the issues of life learning maturity, handling sin, error, philosophical disputes, offense, righteousness and blessing like mature adults confident in the word and judgment of God, not petulant children insecure in all their ways.<sup>97</sup> It's real. Then, as in any group, there are some who are gifted at explaining things or praying for people, or singing or healing, or speaking a word of wisdom or knowledge . . . and at some point, everyone listens to them explain things or pray and sing or lay bare their hearts. It might even be an argument that everyone listens to, such as the following point on musical instruments.
5. Yes instruments. Music is the projection of the person much like a lecturer using notes. The notes, lectern and the instrument are not added, they are part of what it means to make music or to teach. Whether it is an excellent dish, a painting, a photograph, a poem, a novel a song by voice or instrument or ensemble, the tool one might have to express that art, like an oven or stove, is as much a part of the creator as his hand or lips. Let the skeptic who does not know how to play the instrument try and they will prove the fact that the musician and his instrument are one. The beauty created is as much a part of the creator as a newborn is with its mother separate, yes, but joined at her breast. The same person who would object to a believer's art is someone who would find babies a burden to be banished from the congregation. They have no place in the assembly of God's people because they fail to discern the body of Christ. Beauty of instrumental music is not "added to" the worship

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<sup>96</sup> I Corinthians 11:17-34

<sup>97</sup> I Corinthians 2:3; esp. 4:1-7

- except for the most coarse and profane ignoramus.
- 6. It all takes about 2 or 3 hours, then they clean up. It's going to happen again so there is no urgency in the entire service for an agenda though one could be helpful if not canonized.
  - 7. Now read through the accounts of the last supper, see if this is how Jesus regulated it being unperturbed by almost everything that agitates the priests of the Church ever since. Diligently search the writings of his Disciples to see if they ran the Church any other way.
- F. As the group grows, it naturally divides, and new groups start up. It would not be wrong to build a meeting house, but administration of the petty can consume God's people. With that warning, no matter what the size of the meeting room or its amenities, at some point by God's grace there must be division for new groups to begin or something terrible will have happened, the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit, the candle stick of Revelation 2-3 will have been quenched and this branch of God's people will have therefore been cut off, it will have stopped filling the earth, subduing it and disciplining the nations. This should drive people to their knees and to fall on their faces humiliated at their rank hypocrisy.<sup>98</sup>
- G. The ministry of God's people gathering creates a space where all may come bringing everyone they meet. There they gather people who, one day, one person, one experience at a time change the world. They don't come to a lecture, or a special leader, they come to the people of God who are changed. They come to eat and talk and listen with people who discover ways to make it better for each other. They understand service because they understand how God's law and grace meet and kiss in the Cross which now defines their life and purpose. Their leaders aren't Spiritual Big Wigs who need support, though they may help support them. Leaders are the people the congregation recognizes as the best at meeting needs by serving, not the best at running things and keeping everyone in a straight line.
- H. The synagogue was not a Biblically ordained form of gathering, though by the time of Christ it was a normal and accepted social structure through which the Jews created a covenant world wherever they went in the earth. There they both preserved their identity as God's people and drew Japheth into the tents of Shem because the world was attracted to the manifest difference God's law made in

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<sup>98</sup> Revelation 2-3

covenant society. At the time of Christ they numbered 1/3 of Roman society.<sup>99</sup>

1. The synagogue<sup>100</sup> was the opposite of the Temple. The Temple and its worship were strictly defined by its purpose as shadows thrown from the substantive reality of Jesus Christ and His Church.<sup>101</sup> As such they were inflexibly fixed in a way God never intended for his People to be once He gave them a new heart and wrote his law on it. The synagogue provided not so much a liturgical pattern for the first-generation Church, any more than the Greek Theatre or Pagan Temple worship did. What it provided was the free-flowing journey from house to house breaking bread less structured by ritual and more ordered by the things going on very similar to what we find in the Upper Room and the first 30 years of the Church than in any congregation since then. The flexibility and freedom of the synagogue fit the new wineskins God prepared for his New Wine so perfectly no one gave it a second thought.
2. So effective is the free flowing worship inaugurated in the Upper Room and carried on by the Apostles, that 20 or 25 years into that first generation Paul addressing the order of worship in Corinth (1300 miles from Jerusalem) sheds a light on what they were doing there and it is remarkably similar to what they did 25 years before in Acts 1-5 where Philip's four virgin daughters prophesy standing next to old Agabus, and the people go from house to house breaking bread and people got healed or dropped dead.
3. Throughout that first generation, the Regulative Principle of the Last Supper in the Upper Room was the norm. A large meal where people led as they were gifted or anointed and the others were admonished by Paul to pay attention to each other rather than each one blithely believing that they had the only contribution worth making or belly worth filling. Order and decency were an application of Ephesians 5 for mutual submission and in no way were a call to erect an abstract principle of central ritual command turning the living Church of Jesus Christ into the ordered rows of a graveyard presided over by whitewashed monuments to a once living and infectious faith.
4. With the passing of the Apostles, the Regulative Principle of Upper Room worship was abandoned in favor of the

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<sup>99</sup> Genesis 9:27; Zechariah 8:23.

<sup>100</sup> See Bojidar Marinov Axe to the Root Podcast Episode and while you are reading this, Mr. Marinov could you give me the scholarly citation too?

<sup>101</sup> Hebrews 1-10

more rational hierarchy of official mediators controlling the mediated. With the reformation only the theology changed and the government was adjusted with checks and balances to make it harder for one priest to abuse his power, but the functional priesthood of the leaders remained firmly intact. Rejecting the Upper Room, the first few Chapters of Acts, and Corinthians 12 being found unfit to apply to any recognizable order of worship, historians have sought a foundation and rationale for their worship in the pagan and pre-Christian Jewish world. The best they have been able to do is point to those aspects of the synagogue having nothing to do with its fitness as a new wine skin. They pointed to the judicial function of elders at the city gate, neither of which were pointed to in the teaching of Jesus or the New Testament as blueprints for worship.

5. After 70 AD, the early church laid aside the new wineskins and began their march back into the arms of the pagan forms of authoritarian civil and temple rule, entertainment and organization, forming their worship patterns around them. Within 400 years they had adopted the entire Roman government's civil and temple vocabulary to organize the many layered Church around divine Greek theater of a few actors carrying out a divine ritual before the helpless spectators. Though this pattern and practice is forbidden in the New Testament, and nowhere found in the New Testament church, it remains the priestly pattern into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century since that day resting its government on paid mediating experts officiating over the boiled down rituals of faith enshrined in all books of Church Order written since the Apostles died.
6. And the congregations of their faithful will have it no other way.
7. There is nothing to fear in prying loose the teeth of the elite idea that the Church is only protected by strong leaders who know better than the rest and go out to fight in their behalf to protect the helpless. In its place is the confidence that if the leaders focus on building up the congregation the least among them will carry on the fight as well as the greatest did in the last 2,000 years. The least esteemed member will have all the tools needed to transform the earth and do greater things than Jesus.<sup>102</sup> There will be no immature little ones to be swept away when the elders Jesus envisions have fulfilled their office and the worship and ministry of the Church is restored.

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<sup>102</sup> John 14:12-14.

## V. GROWTH AND DIVISION IN THE BODY OF CHRIST.

- A. The Growth of God's people is an expected and normal part of the victory of Christ in the earth and so dividing the congregation that runs out of space to meet should be a normal part of congregational life.<sup>103</sup>
  1. As the group grows thought should always be given for where to divide and go to next.
  2. Growth is the irresistible presence of the Holy Spirit in the congregation giving life and meaning to the food, fellowship, worship, prayer, singing, teaching, prophesy, rebuke, exhortation, encouragement and love.
  3. If the group stops growing, then address 4 questions:
    - a. What issues of life are no longer addressed personally or in the surrounding world?
    - b. What issues have replaced discipleship?
    - c. Why do we no longer see life in the congregation?
    - d. Why is the Gospel no longer hope for every square inch of the world around us?
  4. Outreach is a function of the heart, each person living the life that has found them, the meaning and purpose in the mutual discipling fellowship of God's people. When these run dry in the life of the congregation, no motivation or technique will fill the void or in the end do anything but kill the fellowship.<sup>104</sup>
  5. Authoritarian government is useful precisely because it can continue the appearance of life, preserving a measure of life until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.<sup>105</sup>
  6. "*Dear friends, even though we are talking this way, we really don't believe it applies to you. We are confident that you are meant for better things, things that come with salvation.*"<sup>106</sup>
- B. There are things other than outgrowing the room, which lead to the separation of God's people.
  1. Should the differences in the congregation be found sufficiently insoluble, the congregation will send forth the disputant and any who agree with them or are offended by

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<sup>103</sup> Genesis 12:1-3; 13:1-13; 15:5; 22:17; 31:49; Acts 2:46; 5:42.

<sup>104</sup> Revelation 2:4-5.

<sup>105</sup> I Peter 1:19; Galatians 4:19; Hebrews 5:12.

<sup>106</sup> Hebrews 6:9.

the congregation's judgment, with its blessing or dire warning, but always with fervent prayer that they be established in the Truth should they start their own congregation based on their teaching.

- a. Division is not necessarily schismatic, but a recognition of our limitations as finite creatures to finally judge one another.
  - b. Division is only schismatic if any difference involves a belief that God's written word is not final to resolve the dispute even though at the moment no convincing resolution seems available to all sides.<sup>107</sup>
  2. Separation for any reason is always in faith that God will guard his divided people from error, and will in time, sift the error or sin out along with those shaped by it.<sup>108</sup>
  3. Each side of the disagreement should always in humility search the Scripture to see if they are the ones to be sifted out, reproved, judged or corrected by God.
  4. Only the rule in the church of the least of these is sufficient for such discernment. The greatest believe that any power they have is God's authorization to demand that everyone be part of their kingdom as they define it in full confidence that their kingdom must be God's Kingdom why else are they elder at all?
  5. In the real world these theological issues are often fronts for the real issues which divide God's people. In both cases it is the least of these my brethren who are most likely to ignore their allure. *"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, . . . "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*<sup>109</sup>
- a. **Control of physical assets** — Control of physical assets — Low budgets make New Testament growth possible. Large budgets supporting expensive assets (buildings,

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<sup>107</sup> John 1:1-10; 16:13-18; I Corinthians 5:11; Ephesians 5:11; I John 4:2-3; II John 1:7.

<sup>108</sup> Isaiah 55:11.

<sup>109</sup> James 4:1-6

conference, grounds, headquarters, mailing lists, etc.) are the greatest roadblocks to growth and the greatest road blocks to real debate of real theological issues. Jesus ran the Church with a budget the size of a small bag which he intentionally entrusted to a traitor and a nonstop argument raging around Him. *His Church thrived.*

- b. **Control of Spiritual Assets** — Humility makes growth possible. In an authoritarian context, any divisive issue is a personal challenge to the leader and it becomes a vote of confidence.<sup>110</sup> But if the leader no longer has institutional power, then there is nothing to fight over, it is impossible to remove the seal of the Holy Spirit, or take it for oneself as the result of a winning a debate. This requires maturity. Jesus ran the Church as a servant, forcing his will and way on no one, sustained only by the Holy Spirit in His teaching, argument and ministry. *His Church thrived.*
  6. The rich young ruler is the story of the Church ruled by the “greatest among you,” not the least; a church ruled by its possessions not by Jesus Christ. The wilderness wandering for the last 2000 years is the fate of the Rich Young followers of Jesus. What if the Church only worked with those who were willing to follow and only in groups large enough to fit into the meeting room, and budgets large enough to fit into the bag, and the bag entrusted to known thieves? *Could we have done worse for the last 2000 years?*
- C. Those who call self-rule by hearts governed by God's law impossible are guided by one main presupposition — immature materialism and the desire for spiritual dominion over brothers and sisters in Christ is inevitable and inescapable. The reality of history is, the task of the elders in the Church always has been and always will be to control the most stuff and have the biggest following all in the best interests of the children/congregation. Those who disagree yet believe that authoritarian rule of elders is the only realistic option for the Church must answer the question: “Then why is it the elders control all the stuff in the Church and control the spiritual assets of the church?” This is no cynical insult, this describes the control and command structure of all but the most destitute of organized congregations throughout history, especially the successful ministries today.
1. If the first objection is, “No it isn’t that way! These things are indifferent, they are tools of the kingdom . . .” the point

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<sup>110</sup> II Samuel 15:4-6.

is proven. The Rich Young Ruler and the Pharisees defended their wealth and Spiritual Dominion in the same terms as they walked away amazed that Jesus could think that “things” and “Spiritual Control” were not be tools of serving God but were in their lives barriers that make it impossible to follow.

2. The definition of the rich young ruler is the definition of the elders since 300 AD: Rich — acquiring great wealth . . . for the church of course; Ruler — firmly maintaining control of all things spiritual and material . . . for the good of the Kingdom of course; Young — dooming themselves and God’s congregation to perpetual immaturity.
  3. “It is not to be so among you.” The real Jesus.
- D. Many things may divide Christian congregations but there is only one schism that truly erases the divide between God’s people and the world — to depart from the conviction that God’s word is final,<sup>111</sup> that whatever doctrine is found in Scripture must be believed and obeyed until clearer light springs from the same word.<sup>112</sup> Outside of the practice of this conviction, there is no light even if one’s doctrines are at many points correct.<sup>113</sup>
1. Ecclesiastical courts of elite elders are not sources of that light, nor of preserving the unity of the faith, or God would have said so and made courts an explicit and exclusive part of an elder’s job description.
    - a. He did not command courts be ordained and he did not make it a power or job description of the elders. To the contrary He explicitly warned against that error.<sup>114</sup>
    - b. There is no historical evidence that authoritarian government preserves the unity of the faith, in fact the exact opposite.
  2. Believing the full authority of Scripture does not grant the same authority to one’s understanding of Scripture. This fact should lead God’s people to humility in the face of God’s Final Truth and seek it in God’s word always and not in man’s decrees however true they might be. Their truth is derivative.

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<sup>111</sup> Genesis 2:15.

<sup>112</sup> Isaiah 8:20; Revelation 22:18-19.

<sup>113</sup> Isaiah 8:20; II Peter 1:19.

<sup>114</sup> Luke 22:25.

- a. This is precisely why factions<sup>115</sup> in the congregation do not need to battle each other to the end of bitter division and hatred (however they mask it in zeal for Truth.)
- b. The reality check is that God's Word and His power is sufficient in days, years and centuries to come to sort error from truth, simply separate the warring factions let them see who is of the Lord.
3. As year succeeds to year God's people are to live by the serene confidence that God's word will weed through all the competing interpretations. He will sustain the true and leave the rest to wither in the thin soil by the rocky road however lovely and healthy their first flowering might have seemed.<sup>116</sup>
4. The discipling task of the elders is to teach the truth and embody it in such a way that the righteous are encouraged and motivated. At the same time to teach the truth in a way that the sinner, the heretic is convicted from the heart and turns, or being unconvinced they depart with our prayers, not our bitter enmity. Paul tells Timothy and Titus to deal with error, contempt, and sinful opposition not through courts and trials, but through sober and mature proven judgment in sound teaching lived out.<sup>117</sup>
5. The disciplinary task of the congregation is to determine where separation is necessary they can send forth the troubler of the congregation with the full confidence that in 25 to 100 to 300 years (sometimes by the end of the week) the world will know who spoke truly for Christ according to the word of God. It is for God's congregation to live in the fullness of what they by faith understand, and to pray for further understanding and grow. It is by that fruitful

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<sup>115</sup> I Corinthians 11:19

<sup>116</sup> Mt 13:1-23

<sup>117</sup> I Timothy 4:6-16, After 3 chapters of different sorts of error and opposition Timothy needed to charge or confront, Paul outlines how opponents of the Truth are to be confronted. Titus also, in each instance where Paul discusses what to look for in an elder, or how Titus should deal with the error on Crete, Paul says the following sorts of things, "teach what accords with sound doctrine, . . . sobriety, . . . self-control, . . . exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you. . . . be ready for every good work, . . . to speak evil of no one, . . . avoid quarreling, . . . be gentle, . . . show perfect courtesy toward all people." These sorts of things are throughout the book, yet not a word on trials, examinations, or discipline. Even, "have nothing more to do with them" Is not disciplinary but rather setting the troublers of the faith off to start a congregation that is ruled by their ideas and see if God would bless them. In the meantime, focus on what builds up God's people. Discipline is not mentioned as one of the discipleship tools.

- growth that God grants increase to His people and weeds their sterile enemies out.<sup>118</sup>
6. To send forth or to start a congregation over a disputed term, doctrine or practice is not schismatic but rather a good and healthy way to remain civil and in prayer each side for the other, trusting God to sustain His word His way, however stiff the opposition; and in the meantime, to remain focused on the task God has given to fill the earth and subdue it undistracted by vain disputes.
  - E. Though Authoritarian government can accomplish many good things, in the end it is insufficient to produce a people able to bear the weight of Glory which God recreated them in Christ Jesus to shine forth<sup>119</sup>. Correct government including what is proposed here cannot nullify the limits of the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment as if practicing the proper forms of self-government will produce godly people capable of self-control. Government, like godliness, like true worship, like love from a pure heart, is not the result of proper technique, liturgy or ritual which produces a godly people. It is the work of the Holy Spirit through the discipleship of the Church which creates a godly people capable of self-government, true worship, pure hearts and love.
  1. The Authority and Power of the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ is not the power to set policy and police it. This power is exclusively the power of the Holy Spirit to speak through the His word to each member of the congregation *including but not limited to those who lead*, to confirm by submission or strike down and refuse submission to any policy. Authority in the Church is accessible to any by birthright, by faith and by service, not by office, status or appointment. It is manifested and verified through service and submission whereby we ratify the truth of God's transforming power. "Lest a grain of wheat fall to the ground and die it abides alone, but if it does . . ." It is the proper heritage of all who are in Christ Jesus from the least of these to the Greatest. "For behold, I am among you a Servant."

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<sup>118</sup> Genesis 1:27-28; 9:27; 15:1-6; 32:12; Exodus 20:5-6; Deuteronomy 7:9-10; Daniel 2:44-45; Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>119</sup> II Corinthians 3:16-18.

2. The Servant is not Greater than His Master nor may he rule the church as if he were. These matters are more fully developed in the following two Chapters VI and VII.

## VI. THE AUTHORITY AND POWER OF GOD'S PEOPLE

- A. What Jesus created was a royal priesthood who would “no longer need anyone to teach them but they would all know Him from the least of them to the greatest.”<sup>120</sup> And because of this knowledge in each believer each is held personally accountable for their evaluation, judgment and actions based on the Law of God. They could not defend error or sin by appealing to authority, like Adam did, “This woman, this elder, this civil governor, you gave me, . . . this serpent deceived me . . . gave me the fruit and I ate.”<sup>121</sup> From Scripture we know that this did not mean Christians would be morally perfect, omniscient, or that the Church did not need the teaching, pastoral and prophetic gifts to disciple God’s congregation. There is still order in God’s house, still a first and a last.<sup>122</sup> There is still a, “Don’t **lead** like the master of the house **lead** like I did, as a servant.” But what is removed from leadership is the authoritarian status to police and punish those who do not follow their lead. To lead in God’s kingdom requires leaders who rely on the power of the Holy Spirit and not on the organization of human hierarchical control — the “greatest among you” cannot do this. The King of all Creation requires more power and authority than the “greatest” will be able to generate through human hierarchies. Authoritarian leaders and subservient followers produce a congregation that cannot bear the weight of glory, the things that eye cannot see, nor ear hear which God has in store for his people.<sup>123</sup>
  1. “A man can’t serve two masters.” “Can a spring give both fresh water and salt?”<sup>124</sup> are not merely moral metaphors, they describe the decision facing all leaders in the Church: Is it God who empowers their word, or is it their control of the congregation that empowers their ministry?
    - a. Does God’s blessing come from the organization’s ordination, and disciplinary control of the sacraments,

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<sup>120</sup> Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:11ff; I John 2:18-27; I Peter 2:9.

<sup>121</sup> Jeremiah 31:29-30. Is the introduction to the Law being written on the heart of flesh. Genesis 3:12-13.

<sup>122</sup> Matthew 19:30; 20:16; Mark 10:31 and Luke 13:30; Ephesians 4:1-10.

<sup>123</sup> II Corinthians 3-4; I Corinthians 2:1-5

<sup>124</sup> Matthew 6:24; James 3:11.

- control of worship, teaching and binding judgments on the congregation?
- b. Or does God's blessing come from the affirmation of the Holy Spirit through the word of their testimony, the blood of the lamb and that they do not love their lives unto death?"<sup>125</sup>
  - c. Scripture is clear, it is the way of the Cross, it is the way of service, not the way of the master of the house, the great ones the Gentiles put in control of the people. It is sound doctrine that the Spirit uses to affirm His leaders and bless the work of their hands and answer their prayers.<sup>126</sup>
2. Had Jesus not spoken to this precise decision, branding authoritarian top down institutional power off limits, calling it "Gentile rule" ( $\epsilon\thetav\omega\kappa\mu\rho\epsilon\nu\sigma\iota\omega\tau\iota\omega$ , the normal term for rightful authority and power to rule, there is no hint of the abuse of power in the term.)<sup>127</sup> then there might be some freedom to negotiate. But what He said, set the two sources of power against each other.
3. This Handbook is distinctive in Church history because it is the first comprehensive attempt to argue that Jesus understood and meant exactly what he said, when He set forth his prohibition of authoritarian government because:<sup>128</sup>
- a. He understood that transforming people from spiritually immature to mature is impossible for men and required leaders who would only rely on the Holy Spirit.
  - b. The nature of authoritarian government limits what it can do. It serves the purposes of a fallen humanity well, but it is as incapable serving the governmental needs of adults who are Spiritually mature, self-governed according to the Law of God written on their recreated hearts of flesh, as

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<sup>125</sup> Revelation 12:11.

<sup>126</sup> Revelation 12:11; Matthew 16:21-27; Mark 10:42-44; I Corinthians 4:14-22; II Corinthians 4:5-17; I Timothy 4:16.

<sup>127</sup> "The rulers of the gentiles rule over ( $\kappa\mu\rho\epsilon\nu\sigma\iota\omega\tau\iota\omega$ ) them and their great ones  $\epsilon\xi\mu\sigma\alpha\zeta\mu\sigma\iota$  exercise authority over them." Luke 22:25, Matthew 20:25 speaks with intensive forms of the same verbs,  $\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\kappa\mu\rho\epsilon\nu\sigma\iota\omega\tau\iota\omega$ , and  $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\mu\sigma\alpha\zeta\mu\sigma\iota\omega\tau\iota\omega$ . All forms refer to the legitimate lawful authority and power that the one in charge needs to lead, not its abuse. Jesus clearly said that the way the nations ( $\epsilon\thetav\omega\tau$ ) structure their government, by putting the greatest among them in charge with whatever power they need to rule, is not to be how His church is to structure its government. See further I Samuel 8, "Give us a king like the nations/gentiles." ( $\gamma\mu\mu\mu\mu\mu$ ; LXX  $\epsilon\thetav\omega\tau$ .)

<sup>128</sup> See **When Children Walked the Earth**. Joseph Foreman; Manuscript and audio book. For a more complete discussion.

- parents are incapable of governing their children after they grow up. Only the servant has the maturity to realize that it is not by might or by power, including the power of human organization, that God's Kingdom is secured.
- c. The New Wine of God's congregation can only adequately be contained by the New Wineskins of self-government, not the old wineskins of punitive external authorities.<sup>129</sup>
  - 4. The full-time discipleship task of leaders in the Church is not to present themselves as brides, but to present Jesus Christ a bride without spot or wrinkle able to both bear and shine forth the full weight of glory as His New Creature.<sup>130</sup> This task requires disciplers, not disciplinarians a concept confused in people's minds, but not in Scripture. They must not be hindered by their own greatness, or the apparent but deceptive greatness thrust on them by organizational office, nor by any sort of legal or administrative work even as central to God's law as the care for widows and orphans or establishing justice is.<sup>131</sup>
  - 5. Authoritarian government is necessary to disciple the ethically and judicially incompetent such as children and the extremely aged, the mentally impaired and the criminal; not the ethically and judicially mature spiritual adult in God's kingdom. Jesus knew that if indulged in as the model for God's congregation authoritarian governing would distract God's Elders from their true objective: mature congregations — a powerful people, not a few powerful leaders. The weakness lies in a governing model that by designed to prevent decay and anarchic death, not promote godly government. Therefore it cannot help but perpetuate the spiritual immaturity it was designed to hold back. The best it can realistically hope to produce is a few exceptions who are recruited and groomed for leadership. The New Testament nowhere accepts this pathetic result as if that must fulfill the word of God written on the heart of each member of God's family, catalyzed by the work of the Holy Spirit poured out on all flesh.<sup>132</sup> Simply because this is the best authoritarian government can do does not mean it is the best the King of God's Kingdom expects to be done.<sup>133</sup> The restored Image of God picks up where Adam and Eve left off —

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<sup>129</sup> Mark 2:22.

<sup>130</sup> II Corinthians 3:7-4:17. Especially 3:3.

<sup>131</sup> Acts 6:2.

<sup>132</sup> Joel 2: 28; Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; Acts 2 esp. 17;

<sup>133</sup> Mark 11:12-25.

- a. The Cultural Mandate to unlock the creative fruitfulness of creation.
  - b. The Great Commission to transform the nations.
  - c. The power and glory unleashed by the authenticating suffering service that go with the Mandate and Comission to open and close the doors of heaven and tear down the gates of hell;
  - d. *These are the birthright of each child of the King,*
  - e. *Not the prerogative and exclusive powers of an elite priestly class of mediators in the Church.*
  6. The Glory in the faces of “the least of these my brethren” is the Glory Paul speaks of in II Corinthians 3:17-18 “*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all,<sup>134</sup> with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*” This is not the glory reserved for elders.
  7. Is this the reality of the Christians the world encounters each day? Or is “blown about by every wind of doctrine”<sup>135</sup> the reality? Does taking away congregational control from a select group of leaders and replacing it with the requirement of the right and duty of private judgment result in anarchy? or the blessing of free self-government?
  8. The inescapable issue here is the offense of the cross. The cross is God’s design for ministry, organization, service and authenticating leaders. Jesus calls alternative organizing, authorizing, or certifying principle for leadership and ministry Satanic.<sup>136</sup>
- B. There is no way around the offense of the Cross. When Peter Confesses, “You are the Christ.” Jesus elevates him to the dizzying height of the Corner Stone of the Church throughout the ages and gives him the keys of God’s Kingdom to close the very gates of Hell. He is to be submitted to. Within minutes Peter, the corner stone, is dashed to the ground, called, Satan. Peter is now the stumbling stone that will cause the Jesus Christ Himself, and the church throughout the ages to fall and the keys to be taken away should they submit to his word. In no way is he to be submitted to. His authority that came from the commission of Christ in verse 18 is lost in verse 23 because he sought to remove the offense of the Cross

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<sup>134</sup> NOT “WE ELDERS.” Written in a book that found no role for elders to resolve the myriad of problems the Corinthians were ensnared in.

<sup>135</sup> Ephesians 4:11.

<sup>136</sup> Matthew 16:23 “Get behind me, Satan!”

— the offense of Philippians 2 — the offense of the Christian life in which authority, the right to be submitted to, is based on service, on taking up your cross and following Jesus.<sup>137</sup> Rest your authenticity, your word, your ministry your ordination on anything else and it's, "get though behind me Satan!" Service is not a sympathetic metaphor, it is not a "servant's heart." It is the difference between Peter the Corner Stone of the Temple of God and Peter the Stumbling Stone who makes Christ himself and His church useless tasteless salt on the dung heap.

1. If this can happen to Peter it can happen to any elder who seeks authority other than service, the cross, Scripture, to be the authority that empowers his ministry.
2. If after 2000 years honesty demands the admission that the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ have not produced such unveiled Christians capable of mature self-government marked by the Cross of Jesus Christ, should we the elders not be called to account and more than willing to ask, "Why?" . . .
3. Should we not follow that question wherever Scripture takes us to answer it? To look with open eyes where no one has opened their eyes before, such as at the warning that Jesus gave: that leadership that fails to be the suffering seed falling to the ground is gentile leadership and, "It shall not be so among you!"?<sup>138</sup>
4. Those who believe authoritarian government is necessary, inevitably accuse themselves of immaturity as soon as they explain that, "The Church would descend into anarchy — chaos and disorder, heresy, sin and error — if the elders did not have the power to control admission to the sacraments; to control standing in the Church; to control worship and teaching; if the elders did not have exclusive control of the keys of the kingdom and power over the body of Christ; if the elders NOT the believer is the final judge of what the believer is to believe and do." If they are correct, then they have just described what immature people do because if they are unable to control themselves, then they must be controlled in a way appropriate only for children, the mentally impaired, and the criminal.<sup>139</sup>
5. The defining mark of maturity is the child who no longer needs the external forceful guiding hand of the parent to

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<sup>137</sup> Matthew 16:21-27.

<sup>138</sup> Matthew 16:24; John 12:24; There is no institutional exception, or institutional fulfillment, or institutional certification of this word.

<sup>139</sup> Galatians 3:24; 4:19.

govern him to do what is right from the heart.<sup>140</sup> If self-government is beyond a child's ability at age 20, then he is considered impaired and treated like a child not an adult sadly needing to be controlled by others.<sup>141</sup> Like the child, if the congregation after a reasonable amount of time is unable to walk self-governed by God's law from their heart without falling into anarchy and bitter contention, then by definition the authoritarian government of God's people has failed.

6. The very definition of maturity is that self-governing men and women of the Spirit "have no need to be taught to 'know the Lord.'"<sup>142</sup> Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8 define maturity as Christians having hearts of flesh inscribed by God's law able to live and apply God's word to all of life through self-government. Yet the claim that this would lead to anarchy indicates that the discipleship of the last 2,000 years managed to erase what God's word says is written on the heart of His people.
7. Some will argue that authoritarian control by the leadership is barely able to compel people to unite in order to ward off heresy and sin. Therefore, they argue, how could a sane person propose self-governing freedom in Christ<sup>143</sup> as a unifying force for sound doctrine and unity?<sup>144</sup> The Church would fly apart at the seams with division. Again, this is their appeal to the lack of self-control in the Church as they know it. If the Church would be overrun by an anarchy of sinful divisions (which is not an unreasonable fear) that is proof that they who are offended at being thought immature are themselves confirming this immaturity. Only the immature cannot govern themselves freely in Christ.
8. What clearer admission that the old authoritarian wineskins cannot produce mature Christians nor handle the New Wine of Jesus Christ could there be? You cannot ignore Jesus' command to avoid authoritarian rule and expect to produce mature congregations.<sup>145</sup>
9. The disciples thought a fruitful peaceful home would be impossible with their brides if Jesus took away their power

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<sup>140</sup> I Corinthians 13:11.

<sup>141</sup> Hebrews 5:12-14; I Corinthians 3:1-4

<sup>142</sup> Jeremiah 31:33-34; Ezekiel 11:19-20 & 36:26; John 14:16,26 & 15:7-10,26 &16:13; Hebrews 8:10-11 & 10:16; I Corinthians 3:5.

<sup>143</sup> II Corinthians 3:3,17 & I Corinthians 2:15.

<sup>144</sup> II Timothy 1:7 "God has given us a spirit of . . . love, power and self control."

<sup>145</sup> Luke 22:25ff.

to rule over them with the threat of divorce.<sup>146</sup> So too, elders today who object to the loss of their power over the Bride of Christ for fear of lawless anarchy and bitterness believe that the bride of Christ in their charge would descend into every heresy and sin if they did not control her with the threat of discipline and divorce/excommunication. What clearer confession could there be that Authoritarian leadership is incapable of inheriting the promises of God, and therefore Jesus said they could not rule over either their own brides or his Bride by threatening divorce (excommunication).

10. This does not do away with Church discipline.

- a. Jesus positively said in Matthew 18 that the power of separating people from the congregation belongs to the congregation not only in full session but in groups of two and three.
- b. Jesus negatively forbade His elders to form an organization that would hoard this power of discipline to themselves as one of his last instructions to them in the Upper Room the night he was betrayed saying “It is not to be so among you.”<sup>147</sup>
- c. Paul positively focuses on the discipling function of elders throughout Timothy and the maturity of God’s people as a whole as the end result of an elder’s ministry.
- d. Simply because Jesus takes discipline away from the elders as a tool of discipleship does not mean He has removed discipline from the Church.
- e. His goal was not elders with the ethical judicial maturity to exercise discipline but discipleship producing mature believers — the congregation — able to withstand the winds of doctrine who exercise discipline.
- f. Discipline, the keys of the kingdom, is a power granted each believer in the congregation jointly and severally. Elders may discipline because they are believing members of the congregation of Jesus Christ, not because they are elders.

11. No matter how they might protest, the power of the elders to control access to every aspect of congregational life is the power of priestly mediation.<sup>148</sup> The power to require submission of the congregation is the power of atonement should the submission be in error. The arrogation of these two powers has failed to produce even one mature

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<sup>146</sup> Matthew 19.

<sup>147</sup> Luke 22:25.

<sup>148</sup> I Timothy 2:5.

congregation that doesn't need authoritative men functioning as atoning mediators to keep it in line through submission of the people to their will. If this described the extent of the maturity of your son when he came of age, you would confess your failure as a parent. How much more so the failure of the great men of the Church to heed the words of Jesus Christ who said, "It is not to be so among you!"? Instead believers are told that because of sin and the impotence of God's word and Spirit, we must settle for an infant codependent church until the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.<sup>149</sup>

- C. God does not need the puny powers of this world's organizations to validate His Word and His minister's authority and power. God's Spirit speaking through His Word are sufficient validation.<sup>150</sup> The servant's suffering service is the validation He both seeks and will uphold.
- D. Many readers frustrated with authoritarian governments are deeply moved hearing that "the least of these" is given the full power and authority of Heaven and Earth promised in Jesus Christ. Hearing this it is easy to believe more highly of themselves than they ought, think that they are more mature than in reality they are.
  - 1. Nothing written in the Handbook should be taken as proof that the reader or the reader's fellowship has grown in sufficient maturity to govern themselves from the heart so as to remove the necessity of authoritarian leadership.
  - 2. Simply because self-government of God's people is the ultimate goal of history does not mean that it is achievable today, or by you, simply because it is possible to picture it, or describe it, or write a handbook to implement it. Self-government is for the mature who "are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."<sup>151</sup>
  - 3. Free self-government is Utopian to the congregation whose elders have failed to disciple to spiritual maturity, tossed by every wind of doctrine.<sup>152</sup> But it is not Utopian to the congregation bearing the fruit of ethical and judicial maturity becoming in Christ what Adam and Eve were to become had they obeyed God at the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil — mature rulers of the earth needing no man to coerce them unto righteousness.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Hebrews 5:12

<sup>150</sup> I Corinthians 2:4-5; 4:18-21.

<sup>151</sup> Hebrews 5:14.

<sup>152</sup> Romans 12:14-18; I Corinthians 3:1-4; Galatians 5:15-16 & 22-26.

<sup>153</sup> Hebrews 5:14.

4. The question though, is, "If God's plan is for more than what Authoritarian government can produce, how does a Church attain the freedom of self-control if today's immaturity, (confessed to by all as the reason Authoritarian government cannot be abandoned) is as good as the way of the Gentiles can do?"
  5. Free self-government will not come with revolution or with declarations or blueprints. If it could the Bible would have been written that way. It can only be the fruit of God's people when they grow sufficiently into the fullness of the stature of Jesus Christ.<sup>154</sup>
- E. The following are Scriptural guidelines for those who want to live the difference between anarchy and being freely self-governed by God's law from the heart:
1. Elders whose single-minded focus is to disciple a growing body that is not blown about by the winds of doctrine characterized by the Fruit of the Spirit, Faith, Hope and Love.<sup>155</sup>
  2. Elders who walk away from every other administrative drain on their time, whether as judges, or administrators, or even becoming the indispensable Go-To guy of the congregation.
  3. The fellowship which maintains the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace, living without rancor and bitterness over perceived and real differences.<sup>156</sup>
  4. Fellowship which contends for the faith as the warrior-bride they are<sup>157</sup> with all their heart soul and strength,<sup>158</sup> yet without bitterness or strife.<sup>159</sup>
  5. A congregation and their elders confident in the work of the Holy Spirit speaking through the Word to call out, define and refine His people, and therefore able to contend for Truth without needing to use institutional force to certify or defend it.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Ephesians 4:13; Galatians 4:19; Colossians 1:27.

<sup>155</sup> Galatians 5; I Corinthians 13.

<sup>156</sup> Ephesians 4:1-6; 31 John 17:9-24; ; I Corinthians 1:10.

<sup>157</sup> Proverbs 31:10, "A warrior wife, who can find?" The root חַיֵּל; pron. Chayil; Strong #2428, translated throughout scripture as: "valiant, army, wealth, substance, valor, men of war." This is the Warrior-wife the Warrior-Bride of Christ whose husband Jesus Christ is establishing justice in the gate of the city.

<sup>158</sup> Revelation 2:4; Jude 1:3 (notice the intensity of Jude and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter's contention for the faith.) Luke 10:27; Ephesians 5:25 Revelation 21:9; I Peter 5:1-4; I Timothy 5:17; Acts 20:28.

<sup>159</sup> I Corinthians 16:14; Philippians 2:14.

<sup>160</sup> John 14-17.

6. A congregation with elders who understand that growth, and division are a necessary part of relying on God's Word and Spirit to sort all differences so that in the end if disagreement on an aspect of faith or action is impossible to overcome the congregation can divide in peace.<sup>161</sup>
- F. No amount of wishful thinking can make it possible for the ideas in this Handbook to work apart from the fruit of maturity listed in E above. But by the same token, where that fruit is manifest, no amount of authoritarian demands or punishments can bind such people to live under authoritarian governments.

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<sup>161</sup> Which is why this form of government is the fruit of, not the cause of, the issues discussed in Chapter II. on the sufficiency of God's Word and Spirit to call out and define the congregation; and Chapter V. on the growth and division of the Church; and Chapter IV on the nature of Christian worship and fellowship to provide the context for these three things to take place.

## VII. THE AUTHORITY AND POWER OF LEADERS

- A. The world transforming power of the Holy Spirit<sup>162</sup> speaking through the Word of God is True Power, flowing from True Authority unmediated by any human authority to each child of God.<sup>163</sup> This is the only<sup>164</sup> power Jesus wanted his people to know<sup>165</sup> in the Church especially when forming congregational fellowships — It is this power that dwells in the lowliest believer to whom “*the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, gives the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of your calling, what are the riches of the glory of your inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe*<sup>166</sup>, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ . . .”<sup>167</sup> This authorization from God dwells in each believer and any human organization of leaders is created to foster and disciple that self-governing authority,

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<sup>162</sup> John 3:16; Matthew 28:18-19; Acts 1: 8.

<sup>163</sup> Timothy 2:5.

<sup>164</sup> John 13:15-16; Matthew 20:25; Mark 10:43; Luke 22:25; John 14:12-18, 25-26; 15:18-27; 16:7-15; Acts 1:8; I Corinthians 1:5, 18, 23-25; 2:1-5, 6, 10, 13-16 The citations of scripture’s claim that the power and knowledge of God’s people and their rulers depends only on the Holy Spirit without a word referring to an empowered organization of elders would fill up the next three pages. The verses could be consistent with that power in an organization of elders can still be counted on the fingers of one hand, if 3 have been cut off. Even then, these verses do not grant such power they could simply be interpreted as consistent with it if it were granted somewhere in Scripture. To find an organization with an authorized head as the only authorized mediator of this power to the Church the exegete must import it in violation of the entire testimony of Scripture and the specific prohibition of Jesus. There are no verses explicitly stating that the decision of elders is the exclusive decision of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>165</sup> In the biblical sense. Idolatry, fornication and abuse of power are intertwining themes in Scripture. A common analogy for idolatry in Scripture is fornication, Jeremiah 3:6; Revelation 2:14; One of the most disgusting uses of this analogy is Ezekiel 23 where Israel was trusting/fornicating/knowing its political security and future to Babylon. Revelation 18:3 combines the moral, religious and political issues in the same analogy combining the 2nd and 7th commandments.

<sup>166</sup> NOT “TOWARD US WHO ARE ELDERS . . .”

<sup>167</sup> Ephesians 1:17-23; II Corinthians 3:7-4:18.

remembering that they, the leaders, are still subject to the judgment of those they are serving.<sup>168</sup> This self-government of each Christian is God's creation design to make righteous government powerful, and wicked government impossible, by forbidding any government labeling of their managerial actions as, 'God speaking through the church.'

- B. All who are born of the Spirit, professing faith in Jesus Christ, can be defined by paragraph VII.A. and are capable of Free Self-Government. Therefore, in a world that from Genesis 3 until today knows only authoritarian rule — the rule of select men who bear an authority and power to rule over their subjects, which the people they rule do not have — it is important to clearly state the Real Authority and Power which Christ holds out to the leaders in His church.
- C. Authoritarian government was not the original design for humanity, nor God's intended pattern for social organization, but rather a design that could serve to postpone the promise of death to those who rebel against God's word<sup>169</sup> until he came.
  - 1. The Government God planned from the Creation was that creatures who bore His image and likeness with His law shaping their heart would grow to ethical (knowledge) and judicial (application) maturity, so that they could freely govern themselves (take responsible action) with no need of an authoritarian executive government of men to force them to unpack the riches of God's world ("Be fruitful multiply and fill the earth") in conformity with the Law of God — which is the source code of creation.
  - 2. When Adam and Eve covenanted with death, they required the extreme ministry of authoritarian governors<sup>170</sup> to sustain them from death until Christ, the Second Adam, came with His promised redemption, to crush the head of the serpent, restore and reestablish his Creation Order in the Earth, and empower the free government of self-control.<sup>171</sup>
  - 3. In Jesus Christ God has begun the transformation of humanity.
  - 4. This transformation restores our hardwiring — our source code, the prime directive — of God's law in the heart of His people according to Jeremiah, Ezekiel and

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<sup>168</sup> Ephesians 5:1-2, 21. Cf. Gordon Runyan.

<sup>169</sup> Matthew 19:8.

<sup>170</sup> Genesis 2:17, Genesis 3:16.

<sup>171</sup> Genesis 3:15; II Timothy 1:7; Luke 10:19; Malachi 4:2-3.

Hebrews.<sup>172</sup> This does not require perfection but does result in a true growth in historically measurable sanctification, enabling a better way.<sup>173</sup> As God's people grow in grace, they disciple the nations and they grow in personal understanding of God's law and self-control doing even greater things than Jesus did.<sup>174</sup>

5. God's first promise in history was that death would attend the rejection of His Word.<sup>175</sup>
6. God's first promise after Adam and Eve rejected His word was to promise that the Serpent would never succeed. He and his seed would be crushed in that same historical continuum begun there in the Garden by the woman whom God would redeem with her skull crushing Seed.<sup>176</sup>
7. Because sin hardened her and her husband's heart making a life-giving world an almost impossible field of thorns and thistles, God promised the woman a form of government in the home which would enable humanity to continue but only through organizing itself in the form of patriarchal authoritarian governments, starting with her patriarchal family.
8. To survive, humanity would need the guidance of strong central-authoritarian leaders because people are morally incompetent to govern themselves freely from the heart.
9. Traditional government since the fall assumes ethical hearts of stone will forever keep God's people from self-government. Therefore, individuals (governors, leaders, elders, kings, priests) are granted power by God to force others to unite with them and to obey their laws and programs enabling the survival and even the marginal success of mankind.
10. Authoritarian government has been the universal experience of all human organization — the power given to those in charge to force through threat of punishments their way or execution, banishment, divorce, or beatings. It is inconceivably Utopian to think that it could be any other way, that is, until Christ.

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<sup>172</sup> As cited throughout.

<sup>173</sup> II Corinthians 3:18 & I Corinthians 12:31.

<sup>174</sup> Matthew 28:18-19; John 14:12-14; 16:12-15.

<sup>175</sup> Genesis 2:17.

<sup>176</sup> Genesis 3:14-15

11. From the beginning it was not so.<sup>177</sup>
12. Jesus said not to organize this way anymore.<sup>178</sup>
- D. Authoritarian government is not the opposite of self-government. It is not sinful. It is the external application of God's law which becomes sadly necessary where ethical and judicial maturity of individuals is lacking because the deformity of sin has formed a people lacking the self-control to live God's law from their heart, called by Scripture, having a heart of stone, or a hard heart.<sup>179</sup>
  1. As martial law is an appropriate form of emergency government in the face of a military or natural disaster, authoritarian government is a necessary form of government appropriate to the crisis brought on when Adam and Eve decided that instead of taking the step to ethical and judicial maturity, they would freeze the moral development of humanity and render mankind morally incompetent, incapable of self-rule.
  2. Though often authoritarian government is unpleasant for the community that lacks the transforming work of the Christ, the alternative is chaos, rape and death.
- E. Authoritarian control is not what Jesus taught and it is not what the NT at every point assumes and directs.
  1. The normal power of humanity in which the Creation was designed to operate, is the power of the Holy Spirit speaking through God's Word, directing life from the heart.
    - a. This life changing power was prayed for by Moses to be exhibited in all God's people not just their rulers, as their only hope for political peace and prosperity.
    - b. When some elders kept prophesying away from the others, those with Moses immediately understood the political impact of a source of Divine authority not under the control of the central government of Moses and his elders.<sup>180</sup>
    - c. They begged Moses to stop this unauthorized source of Divine authority since it threatened their own political authority and power to control God.
    - d. Moses' reply, "*Would that all God's people had His*

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<sup>177</sup> Matthew 19:8-9.

<sup>178</sup> Matthew 20:25; Mark 10:43; Luke 22:25.

<sup>179</sup> II Corinthians 3:3, 7.

<sup>180</sup> Numbers 11:24-30

*Spirit on them!"* confirmed the lost creation order and the future hope that it would be restored, and that authoritarian government would not be the last word of how the Kingdom of God would govern the earth.

- e. This life changing, heart changing power was foreseen by the prophets as the mark of Messiah's government where dead hearts of stone would be turned to living hearts of flesh ethically transformed, having God's law written on them "*so the increase of His government and of peace would have no end.*"<sup>181</sup>
  - f. Hebrews confirms this transformation as the mark that defines and frees the Christian to mature self-government confirming both Moses' law, his prayer, and Jeremiah's prophesy. Hebrews chides God's people for being so slow to get the implications of who they now are in Christ.<sup>182</sup>
  - g. These are foundational political passages dealing with the possibility of free self-government when people's hearts are changed.
- 2. Yet this mark of the Church, the self-government God promised, is what the world says will cause anarchy if the power of organizational coercion<sup>183</sup> by a central leader, or committee of leaders, is abandoned and Jesus Christ takes his rightful place in each believer's life.
  - 3. Anarchy is not the result of Jesus Christ dwelling in His people unmediated by any elite priests or elders. Neither does anarchy result when Jesus' sacrifice does away with the false alternative atonement of the leaders who somehow claim to atone for the sins of those who submit to them when they are in error.
- F. Worldly corporations, organizations and their decrees are a form of power, but not where true power lies. In denying that power to elders in the Church, Scripture does not deny the leaders of the Church True Oversight of

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<sup>181</sup> Isaiah 9:6-7.

<sup>182</sup> Hebrews 5:12-14.

<sup>183</sup> Ephesians 6:9 "*Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening,*" Echoing the very words of Jesus in Luke 22:27, Paul removes the coercive powers of the master from the slave-master, "*Masters do the same . . .*" the same as what? The same as the slave in directing his labor, "*not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man.*" how much more is service — the cross — the definer of who are the pastors and elders of the Church?

the Bride of Christ, True Authority and True Rule with True Power, as some falsely claim this Handbook to say.<sup>184</sup>

1. Paul can say of the rulers in the Church to Timothy, "*Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.*" Jesus speaks of the last being first. There is still order, rule and preeminence.<sup>185</sup>
  2. This power is seen when Paul challenged those disturbing the Corinthian Church He said, "*my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. . . Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power. What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?*"<sup>186</sup>
  3. This is this power which Scripture calls the birthright<sup>187</sup> of every Child of God and it is most clearly seen, though not uniquely seen, in those who aspire to be elders whose power in the Holy Spirit to transform a congregation through laying down their lives and so establish their self-government in Christ is the greatest power known to man.<sup>188</sup>
- G. This power of a mature congregation which Paul speaks of is the True Authority and Power of the Elders, not as distinct from the power of any believer but as distinct from the fleshly powers of the organizations of men whose whole mode of authoritarian rule in the earth is coming to a close as surely as the rule of kings bowed to the rule of constitutional government. Therefore, it is worth enumerating this power Christ gives to all in His Body of which the rulers in the Church are exemplary:

1. The greatest power, and the greatest authentication of

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<sup>184</sup> Romans 3:8.

<sup>185</sup> 1 Timothy 5:17; Mark 10:31,40, 43-45.

<sup>186</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:4-5; 4:18-20

<sup>187</sup> John 1:13; 3:5-8.

<sup>188</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1.

authority is the Cross, “*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*” “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*”<sup>189</sup> This is the authority Christ said was not limited to the power of His atonement, but was the pattern of his ministry and behavior, and was to be the pattern for all Christian life, not merely specialized ministry. It is especially how to authenticate the word and actions of those who are set apart to lead. Serving is not the authority and power of the master of the house, his power and authority is merely to legitimately make enforceable demands on people (authoritarian government). By demanding we operate our lives only by the authority of the servant,<sup>190</sup> Jesus explicitly, intentionally, in black and white rejects the authority and power of the master at every point leadership is brought up in the Gospels and the Epistles, and accepts only those things that God does from heaven to verify His word and the word of those who lead in His name.

2. The power of knowing there is no plan b, that it is the power of the Spirit or nothing. If God is not in the midst of the camp we may as well not go up from here.<sup>191</sup> Jesus said He did not speak His own words, or perform His own miracles or presume upon God to back up whatever He said or did. It was the Father who gave him His words and honored His request for miracles.<sup>192</sup> Jesus told His disciples that this same power of God would attend them<sup>193</sup> if by faith they refused to live by any other

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<sup>189</sup> Matthew 16:24; John 12:24.

<sup>190</sup> Luke 22:27; Matthew 16:24; Mark 10:43-45. The exclusive term, “*whoever*” excludes from power all who seek another power source, even when it is Peter. When he suggests something other than the cross, He becomes the spokesman of Satan, Matthew 16:22-23. “*Far be it (the cross) from you, Lord.*” There is no Lordship for God himself if he follows a different pattern for power (Philippians 2:1-11) Paul in v9 saying “*Therefore*” makes clear that there is no other power source, no other form of authentication of one’s word or life. No valid organization of leaders calling themselves servants while empowering themselves as masters. Literally, the Devil is in the details (Matthew 16:23). You think elders are servants? Read the details of the powers they have granted themselves.

<sup>191</sup> Acts 1; Luke 22:25ff; John 13-17; Exodus 33:15.

<sup>192</sup> John 5:19; 6:38; John 12:49;

<sup>193</sup> Matthew 18:19; Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24; John 14:13; John 15:7; John 15:16; John 16:23–24; James 1:5-6; John 5:14-15; I John 3:22.

power or authority which he called the way the "*Nations rule over and exercise authority.*"<sup>194</sup> Why Faith?

3. The power of the full armor of God.<sup>195</sup> The power of never needing to wage Spiritual war with the impotent institutional weapons of the organizational flesh (a king, an executive pastor, a ruling elder, like the nations, King Saul's armor) which are of no use against principalities and power and rulers in high places. The law of Moses severely curtailed, institutional power and Samuel and Jesus directly forbade Kings like the nations as utterly inadequate for the rule and dominion of God's people.<sup>196</sup> In forbidding such authority and power, they did not forbid authority or power itself such as the full armor of God, only that patterned after the nations which is worthless to get at the heart of our conflict.
4. The power of successfully discipling an Ephesians 4 congregation who are maturely able to distinguish sound from unsound doctrine.<sup>197</sup> Facets of an Ephesians 4 congregation are:
  - a. The Power of the unity of mind and heart of the congregation<sup>198</sup> on each issue as it arises based on personal conviction not the external coercion of those in charge.<sup>199</sup> This is the power that comes when all the congregation is led by these elders only as far as each member is willing to follow them in Christ. It is precisely this freedom of the Congregation in Christ to review each matter for themselves that causes them to be a congregation not of conscripts required to submit, or of fearful children who are afraid not to submit, or

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<sup>194</sup> Matthew 20:25; Mark 10:43; Luke 22:25;

<sup>195</sup> Ephesians 6:10-20

<sup>196</sup> Deuteronomy 17:14-20; I Samuel 8:7, 16-22; Luke 22:25

<sup>197</sup> Acts 15:10-22

<sup>198</sup> General fact — most of the passages calling for submission are in the context of "how to achieve unity" or "what unity looks like." They are an appeal to the individual believer, both believers who follow and believers who lead alike, to submit to each other. No passage grants the authority to those who lead to enforce unity. Unity comes from voluntary submission to those in authority on a case by case basis coupled with the voluntary submission of those who lead to the ones they lead. There is no New Testament call to unity based on the authority of the one in charge to enforce it, only on the authority and power of each believer to seek and affirm it when judged righteous, regardless of their role in the body of Christ. This is a stone-cold fact of exegesis. See the following two footnotes.

<sup>199</sup> Philippians 2:2, 12; Ephesians 6:6; Galatians 1:8, 2:11; I Timothy 5:20.

the arrogant demanding all to submit to them, but of free men and women who freely submit only because they are mature spiritual adults who are as deeply committed to the goals and purposes and vision of the Church of Jesus Christ as the elder they follow. And no power on earth can force them to submit, which is why the New Testament appeals for their submission but nowhere empowers those who lead to enforce it.<sup>200</sup>

- b. The power that comes when the leader respects this mature liberty and obligation in Christ of each believer to judge all things. The willingness to wait on any issue until all are convinced is a power that dwarfs the mere power of a ruling elder to dictate to conscripts forced to obey. This is the power that flows from respecting each believer's standing in Christ to confront the elder to his face, though gently as an older man.<sup>201</sup>
5. the Power of the ministry of the word and prayer manifested in suffering service and its fruit in mature Christians who are not blown about by every wind of doctrine and do not need the external punishments of a father but rather freely walk with their leaders as spiritually mature adults addressing issues, not as children who are themselves the problem needing to be babysat.<sup>202</sup>
6. The power of the conviction and support of the Holy Spirit in the life and testimony of the leader as He is seen and submitted to on a case by case basis<sup>203</sup> by all who have known the elder — his testimony and his track record over time.<sup>204</sup>
7. The power to lead a people each one of whom has the

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<sup>200</sup> Calling for Submission: Hebrews 13:17; I Peter 2:13-17, 5:5; Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1-3; John 13:12-17; Matthew 19:30, 20:16, 25-28. Making submission the hallmark of every Christian especially those thought of as ruling: Ephesians 5:2 (the cross, for everyone), v21 (everyone), v22 (Wives), v25 (Husbands), 6:1 (Children), v4 (Fathers) v5 (slaves), v9 (Masters). The alternative to mutual submission is Tyranny or Anarchy.

Verses empowering anyone in authority to enforce submission: Cricket, Cricket, Cricket.

The only disciplinary power in the New Testament is the power of the congregation (Matthew 18:15-18; I Corinthians 5) and the individual (Luke 10:18) to call upon God to deal with error and then act upon that call and walk away.

<sup>201</sup> I Corinthians 2:15; Gal 2:14; I Tim 5:1.

<sup>202</sup> Acts 6:4.

<sup>203</sup> I Corinthians 2; I Timothy 5:20, 6:1-7.

<sup>204</sup> I Corinthians 2; I Timothy 5:22, 6:1-7.

ethical judicial maturity and authority to turn the keys of the kingdom of heaven, to shake the dust off their feet and depart in judgment from those who refuse instruction. Paul gives Timothy the example of handing them over to Satan to learn not to sin. Jesus tells the congregation that they can pronounce judgment on those who refuse to heed their judgment in groups of two and three, if necessary, not just when everyone is there together. These are the weapons of spiritual warfare given by Jesus to His Church from the least of them to the greatest. The power of God backing up his people's word.<sup>205</sup>

8. The power of an overabundance of the fruit of the Spirit in walk and speech.<sup>206</sup> Who are able to earnestly contend for the faith without bitterness, rancor and malice.<sup>207</sup>
9. The power of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as they are manifested in the prophetic and pastoral clarity of teaching and argument, that cuts to the heart of any matter He addresses producing an Ephesians 4 congregation.<sup>208</sup>
10. The power of sound "*instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*"<sup>209</sup> The instruction may be vigorous comparing it to a good fight, or it might be exhausting but unquenchable such as two years arguing in the Hall of Tyrannus or it may be disastrous such as when Paul was stoned and thrown out of town or washed ashore on a shipwreck. But power is not found in suing or judging in courts of elders and then those elders binding the consciences of the congregation who are spectators at best to the "real" power of the organization of leaders.<sup>210</sup>
11. The power of intercession, to pray and entreat God for all men knowing He is a God who hears and Acts.<sup>211</sup>
12. The power of Good Character, "*Be above reproach, the*

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<sup>205</sup> Luke 10:11; Matthew 18:15-20; I Timothy 1:20-23.

<sup>206</sup> Galatians 5.

<sup>207</sup> Ephesians 4:31-32.

<sup>208</sup> Philippians 2:1-2, 4:1-9; Eph 4:11ff; Hebrews 4:12.

<sup>209</sup> I Timothy 1:3,5,22

<sup>210</sup> Here, as throughout, this handbook, there is no footnote to find something that is not in Scripture, namely the authority of elders to preside in courts resulting in pronouncements that bind the congregation.

<sup>211</sup> Acts 6:4; I Timothy 2:2,8; James 5:17.

*husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, able to teach, respectable, hospitable, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money, one who manages his own household well, [or else] how will he take care of the church of God? not a new convert, have a good reputation with those outside.”<sup>212</sup>*

13. The power of godly self-discipline and teaching sound doctrine, is how Paul tells Timothy to overcome attacks on the Church from those who “*depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, to nourish those who fall away into various sorts of error.*” Paul’s command is not to institute courts made up of elders who put such men on trial, but rather, “*pointing out these things to the brethren, . . . nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine . . . have nothing to do with worldly fables . . . discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. . . . we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. Prescribe and teach these things.*”<sup>213</sup>
14. The power to overcome all who look down on the calling and aspiration to be an elder or who oppose the authority of those who lead is to “*in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.*”<sup>214</sup> How the elder speaks, acts, loves and believes is the weapon of that elder’s warfare, not his authority to convene a court and put an enemy of the faith on trial in a loving way.
15. At this point stop. Reflect on what you have just read. So many of these things you have grown up hearing that they are ideal character traits. Many assume that they are merely ideals for any elder to aspire to, but the power of the elder is in the powers his office gives him to control the Church. In reality, it is the character of the elder in Christ with the law written on his heart that is his power. Read Timothy and Titus again, see how with everything that opposes them, which they must

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<sup>212</sup> I Timothy 3:3-6; Eph 5:25.

<sup>213</sup> I Timothy 4:1-2; 6-7,8,9,11.

<sup>214</sup> Timothy 4:12.

confront and overcome, the “character traits” are in reality the weapons of their warfare, their power, not their office. Paul never says their power and authority is to convene a tribunal and judge those in error.

16. The power to overcome all things is the power of a slave, or child, or Jesus Himself which means Church leaders having no special powers at all to set policy or enforce it with any power other than the power of the Holy Spirit taking *“pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.”*<sup>215</sup>
  17. The power of the Cross is the power which authorizes, verifies and empowers the life and word of each Christian, and is exemplified in the life and teaching of an elder. There is no record that a lawsuit or judging lawsuits was either called for as the elder’s unique office to remedy sin and error in the Church nor is it listed among the among the weapons, strengths, or powers of elders given to them for dealing with error.
    - a. **The only discipline Scripture mentions that elders are to enforce is self-discipline.**
    - b. **The only examination is self-examination,**
    - c. **The only fencing of the table is self-fencing.**
- H. In the light of the true power of those who lead the Church, it is worth noting what the alternative power sources are, and that they cannot be found in the NT except as how not to proceed because they do not empower a leader in the Church in his call to rule or disciple a mature congregation:
1. It is not judicial process that produces a mature congregation — that is what the nations do.
  2. It is not executive enforcement ruling over them like the nations imposing God’s law from the top down, from the outside in which is not how a congregation is disciplined to maturity — that is what the nations do.
  3. It is not legislating and enforcing the congregation’s submission to “good” policies — that is what gentiles do.
  4. It is not controlling the sacraments, the worship or the teaching to be sure only the worthy receive them and so avoid damnation — that is what a priest does.

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<sup>215</sup> I Timothy 4:16.

5. The Apostles and Jesus appeal to none of these as the special powers of the Elders.
- I. The power of the rulers are the powers God grants to each child in His Kingdom, to the Least in the Kingdom of Heaven, as much as to the greatest.
  1. The rule of the Holy Spirit writing God's law on the heart of each believer, does not result in anarchy. Yes, Moses, Jeremiah and Ezekiel<sup>216</sup> were utopian when they first wrote that this would be the mark of the New Covenant. But Jesus and Hebrews<sup>217</sup> were not utopian when they said it **is** the mark of the New Covenant and it means an end to the necessity of Authoritarian rule in the earth as the only way to stave off chaos, disaster and death because of the hardness of their hearts.
  2. The cross, mutual submission, the atonement, and Pentecost is not an obscure doctrine buried somewhere in the Bible. The rule of the Holy Spirit writing God's law on the heart of each believer, results in the realization of God's plan from the foundation of the world to bring freedom, productivity, peace and joy to the transformation and unpacking of all the earth has to offer. It is everywhere written and assumed.
- J. The powers of Authoritarian Government are too weak, too insubstantial, too surface, too far from the heart of the matter to bring the change that God's Kingdom requires. And yet they give the illusion of being the way of strength and the illusion that compared to real coercive power of organizations "mere" reliance on the Holy Spirit and God's law in men's hearts is "merely spiritual," "merely ministerial," and "possibly" legalistic, not a reliance on grace. Knowing this to be false, reformed Christians have argued that the power of the Church is ministerial and spiritual only, and yet their elders exercise the powers of the priest. They still go to the high places of the board of organizing controllers for their authority and certification. They still give back to themselves unique powers that their theology flatly denies them.

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<sup>216</sup> Numbers 11:25-29; Jeremiah 31:33-34; Ezekiel 11:19-20 & 36:26.

<sup>217</sup> John 14:16,26 & 15:7-10,26 & 16:13; Hebrews 8:10-11 & 10:16.

## VIII. CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY — THEOLOGY INTO PRACTICE

### A. The objection:

1. If external Authorities with the power to impose Laws and rules on the people are not permitted in the Church.
  2. Then How do you write rules for procedures (a Book of Church Order) that do not become external laws to be imposed on members by the people in charge?
  3. Answer: When Service is your authentication; When God's Word is your final authority; When your character not your office is your power; When the budget fits in a bag; When no one has status that can be undermined; When you feed all who come . . . Then the world is at your feet.<sup>218</sup>
  4. Ethical Judicial maturity is personal, between you and God — “I AM the LORD YOUR God, YOU shall...” and when settled with God, unity in the Church possible. Though God’s word can be applied to you by the force of third-party authoritarian government, from the beginning it was not so. It was made necessary by our inability to self-govern and if that self-government is not established then your choice is what it was before Christ: authoritarianism or anarchy.<sup>219</sup>
- B. YOU CAN'T DO IT!<sup>220</sup> The question is not what must you do? But what must God do in you? Who must you become?
1. Corporate organization is not an idol you can smash, though there are elements of idolatry about it.
    - a. Authoritarian government is the only form of government that will preserve you from chaos if you do not have a spiritually mature community that can work together.
    - b. To attempt the ideas in this handbook without elders committed to the power of the character of God alone, will inevitably end up in either sliding into permissive error on the one hand or division into a hundred congregations of 1 or 2 on the other.
    - c. The ideas here are not something you can “do.” They are something that in God’s time His people will become, but perhaps not in our lifetimes . . . or perhaps we will see it.

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<sup>218</sup> Psalm 110:1,3. The Footstooling of the world begins with self-government.

<sup>219</sup> Hebrews 5:12.

<sup>220</sup> Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; John 14:12-20; 16:13; II Corinthians 2:9-16.

2. God must change you to literally understand power in a completely different way.<sup>221</sup>
  - a. You must be willing to wait on God to move.
  - b. You must be willing to recognize and go with that move, not merely as some sort of mystical sign that it is time, but rather a transformation of heart.
    - i. It is never the right time for the wrong heart.
    - ii. It is never the wrong time for the right heart.
  - c. You must be with people who can agree on sufficient details of Who God is and what He wants so as not to spend your entire time in
    - i. arcane discussion on the one hand and endless divisions on the other.
    - ii. If you are not finding life in your fellowship sufficient to share, you will never reach the lost world with anything recognizable as faith, hope, or love.<sup>222</sup>
  - d. When you become a, b & c you disciple in others that transformation.
  - e. What follows is not a transformed set of rules that will change your heart, it is rather how your transformed heart will rule.
  - f. That is not just a formulaic wise saying reversal, the locus of change and authority must shift
    - i. from the organization of rulers and rules which are necessary to control the abuse of their power,
    - ii. to the ethically and judicially mature heart of each member of the body of Christ making an authoritative powerbroker an unnecessary impediment.
  - g. Government theory since the reformation has focused on how to provide checks and balances to those in power so they cannot abuse their power. For them, rules of order are vital limits to how leaders can abuse us in the exercise of power.
  - h. But if there is no “power” or “authority,” in the form of an organization to take over and control, if there is no status to undermine, no budget and buildings to control to either use or abuse, then . . .
    - i. our “rules” will have a very different function.
    - ii. They will remind us we do not have that sort of power to exercise, much less abuse.
    - iii. And they will help us avoid either biting and devouring each other on the one hand or passively

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<sup>221</sup> Acts 8.

<sup>222</sup> John 13:34-35; John 17; I John 4:4-8, 12, 16, 20-21.

- accepting any sin or error on the other.<sup>223</sup>
- i. Our rules will address how the liberty to live in Christ can and fall into bondage.<sup>224</sup> One obvious way, of course is the multiplication of rules to keep that from happening.
  - j. The most fundamental questions that shapes all rules and keeps them limited to “advice” —
    - i. “Who must we be to find fulfillment as we listen, share, rebuke, correct, exhort, encourage, sing, teach, argue, worship, eat and reach outside our fellowship with others who have no external compulsion to be a part of what is going on?”
    - ii. “If mature self-governed unity is possible, what sort of maturity must you grow into for it to be possible for you?”
    - iii. “True unity is when the congregation, shares a common vision with no external constraint to do so, no central leader needing to enforce laws because they are lived from the heart.”
  - k. This you will discover when you try to implement what you find here. If you cannot maintain unity in love in the bonds of peace when there is no external organizational force unifying the congregation, then you lack the maturity Scripture calls for and for you the alternative to authoritarian government is anarchy.
  - 3. You must know humility concerning our heritage — you are not starting a church that has been dead for 2,000 years nor is it dead today. Get it deep into your nervous system: The church has no more been dead for 2000 years until you started this congregation, than it was dead for 1500 years until the reformation. Or 400 years until the major doctrinal foundation of the Early Fathers was hammered. The Church through the ages and today, is our Family and those who are part of the corporate church are no less Christian than you are.
    - a. What you are starting is a Congregation.
    - b. That you read this and want to be part of such a congregation as you see here, or have the vision to lead such a congregation, you must know that children have a vision for parenthood also, but it does not mean they are mature parents. Children especially who have never raised their own children also believe they have what it

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<sup>223</sup> See “Appendix A” a list of possible reminders in November’s Barista’s essays in Logic.

<sup>224</sup> Galatians 5:1.

- takes to do it right and avoid all the error they have experienced growing up.
- c. Because God is really calling you, you will realize that He took 2,000 years to get to you and your vision. In that time, He was building a foundation for your steps. This foundation is not to be despised as sub-Christian any more than our descendants 1,000 years from now should look on us wondering if we were even Christian.
  - d. Whatever steps we take with whatever error is in them are the steps necessary to take now so that 1000 years from now they can take the steps to correct our half-way step when they come along, as we correct the half-way step of the reformation's doctrine of the Church.
4. When Elders and Members walk in the power of the Holy Spirit it is a two-way street. Speaking to both the leader and the follower Paul writes, “...*Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*”<sup>225</sup>
- a. **If you lead** you must have the confidence of the people so that you could tell them to do anything and they would do it, and yet rather than telling them what to do, teach them how to understand their situation and do what is right themselves.
  - b. **If you follow**, you must have the confidence in your leaders that you would be willing to do whatever you are told, and yet rather than blind obedience, you work with them to think through the issues because the Leader sees only in part and needs what you see, even if you see less than they do.
  - c. **If you lead** you must be the sort of person who is not anxious to implement your vision for the Congregation until every member involved not only shares but is excited to communicate that vision because they have had a part in creating it. If it is of God, you can trust the word of God to speak through the creation process and trust those you have discipled to be mature in their doubts and discussions necessary for your mutual correction during that time.
  - d. **If you Follow** you must be the sort of person who waits

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<sup>225</sup> Ephesians 4:1-6

until you really see and generate the vision sufficiently to evaluate it before simply trusting your leaders and doing what you are told . . . the leader needs to be surrounded by adults, not children, however willing the child. Maturity is the difference between an adult who thinks through an issue and a brilliant analytical fool who is just good at coming up with objections since after all, they remind you, rule VIII.A.4.d, calls for the need to be “critically analytical.”

- e. **The leader and the followers** must be the sort of people who have no interest in moving until everyone is moving from a common commitment, not from a common leader.
- f. **The Leaders and the followers both** must become people who can argue intensely without being defensive.<sup>226</sup> They understand that there is no “position of authority” to undermine and no policy that will make or break the Church of Jesus Christ, no budget that if spent the wrong way would be wasted. We can relax and think openly from all perspectives safe in the Word of God and the communion of all the saints. God is either in this thing or He is not, and the earlier we find this out the better for all sides involved.
- g. **Remember these are not rules to make you wise or self-controlled, they are the things wise self-controlled leaders and followers do because that is they are wise.**
5. This is a very different sort of person whom we must all become. This isn't freestyle church. It is a gathering of people who are excited about becoming a people characterized by their walk in “*the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*<sup>227</sup>
6. A set of rules or disciplines will not achieve this, nor will

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<sup>226</sup> Jude 1:3

<sup>227</sup> Ephesians 4:13-16.

turning this list of considerations into a set of rules guarantee it. More is required. God is required.

- C. GOD CAN DO IT — You are the Mission of God, Embassy of God, Culture of God, Kingdom of God, Dominion of God, You have nothing to prove.<sup>228</sup> — Your heart is moved. You want to begin. So, begin with prayer.
1. Even if you think you know people who would like this and want to talk to them. Ask God to move on their hearts.<sup>229</sup>
  2. This includes your wife or husband or kids.
  3. Wait for Him. (I can't believe I, a pragmatic Presbyterian, am saying this.)
  4. You will know when God opens up the door.
  5. (I have no idea what I am talking about here but)
    - a. Avoid arguing about any of the details.
    - b. Avoid talking people into this, ESPECIALLY your wife or kids.
    - c. If it's buried treasure in a field it will be right there when God moves their hearts to discover it.
    - d. This point is not to never talk about it, but rather stay away from the appearance of argumentative coercion.
  6. Agree with almost every doubt they have
    - a. be glad they raised it
    - b. take it to the Lord.
    - c. See how it is reasonable.
    - d. Don't just "answer" it even if it seems ridiculously simple . . . especially if it is as simple as taking Ai was to Joshua.
    - e. Ask God to answer it.
    - f. IF it comes up again, just tell them that you are still asking God.
    - g. Ask them if they have asked God.
    - h. Ask them how they would answer the doubt, the objection, the concern.
    - i. (I don't know. It is a whole different approach to power.)
    - j. In the final analysis are you or they people who want to know or who don't want to know?
    - k. Do not treat this as a set of rules, but watch how the wise lead, it usually goes something like this.
  1. Most doubts in other people's mind come not because your ideas are bad, or their faith and understanding of Scripture is small, but because your life has not struck them as being particularly wise. I don't know how to change or address this in you . . . or in me.

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<sup>228</sup> Matthew 5:13-16; II Corinthians 3:3; I Peter 2:4-6;

<sup>229</sup> Nehemiah 1 involves a 4 month prayer vigil before he petitions the king.

- m. God can. And there is no reason to think that he will not begin with you. One thing is true there are millions today who do not see the value in Church as we have known it.
  - n. Will you feed them?
7. Try not to answer the one's closest to you until you can honestly say something like, "I share the same doubt."
    - a. If God is going to make this work, He's got to do more than give us a strong set of arguments.
    - b. We have to feel it to the bone and not be threatened or discouraged when others don't get it.<sup>230</sup>
  8. (All of that is just my thinking what a person unhung up by needing to do God's job for him would respond. You tell me. I've never responded this way before and what has my former life gotten me?)
- D. So God opened the door . . . How do you start? Invite them in to eat with you and talk about Church.
1. So, there's a person or three who is open to becoming the Church of Jesus Christ.
  2. Get together once a \_\_\_\_\_ bring food and eat together and pray and talk and worship together.
  3. Find some place to go other than a restaurant so you can do things like sing or speak from the Scriptures or heart, or walk around. In a park? The back yard? The living room? the basement?
  4. Jesus met in all those places.
- E. "Teach them to observe everything Christ has commanded." See if you caught that. "Teach Them to observe . . ." Ok try one more time: ". . . THEM to observe . . ." We think of teaching as imparting conclusions, or rules or facts or information and answers. But the emphasis is on **them** learning to apply the word of God to all of life as **they** live it and not find this someone else's responsibility to chew it, digest it and regurgitate it for them as if they are small birds.
- F. The following are Bible Studies to have together to begin this walk toward the sort of people who can dwell together in unity without being told what to do. So even if you have done them by yourself (and of course you will have) do not rob the others of what you experienced by telling them what they must learn for themselves . . . and that is that they can learn for themselves, they can "*observe whatsoever I have commanded.*" They don't need you or anyone else to observe

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<sup>230</sup> Psalm 39:3; Jeremiah 20:9; 23:29.

it for them. You and they can put Hebrews 5:12 in the rear-view.

1. Start with Timothy and Titus, where Paul is giving theoretical advice to budding elders. I will give you a lesson in how not to predigest and vomit onto your hearers.
  - a. Do a whole or half a book at a time. Skim it. Jot down the following things and when you are done (the time it takes to read the book and jot about 1 or 2 dozen sentences, what? It will take an hour?) you will have learned for yourself, not from me, who you are in the household of God.
  - b. Jot first, the ways people disregard/oppose Timothy Titus or Paul.
  - c. Next jot the ways they deal with each sentence you wrote summarizing the problem to be overcome.
  - d. What are you jotting down, rules for court? or the character traits represented by each thing in the “to do or be” list? What heals the problems facing Elder Timothy, Elder Titus and the elders they appoint in every city?
  - e. Conclusion, the character traits of an elder, or mature Christian, are in reality the power of an Elder or Christian. It is the power of your character, not your ordination or training, or office that accomplishes the vision God has given you to present each member of the fellowship mature, lacking no good thing.<sup>231</sup> These character traits you wrote down create:
    - i. Someone utterly confident that the Holy Spirit can handle the conflict and that
    - ii. Confident that God always has the last word on both sides of any dispute.
    - iii. Someone who finds it worth taking time to seek God with those who oppose him. The least of these has light to shine, prayers which God hears.
    - iv. These are not super-exemplary power-Christian traits in Timothy and Titus, they are bottom shelf cookies in the reach of all Christians.
    - v. Wait a second, are these lists, the powers of an elder? Or are they the powers of each member of the congregation as they grow — anyone can hope, love, be kind, longsuffering, gentle patient, take heed to themselves and their teaching, be reverent . . . these are not the power-prerogatives of ordained office. These are your power to change the earth.

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<sup>231</sup> Ephesians 5:27, “that He might present her to Himself a glorious church.”  
Psalm 34:8-10. (There is eating again.)

- vi. That old belief we all held in the “officer and his unique powers in the Church” is the illusion, it is the feather in Dumbo’s grasp that he thinks makes him fly.
  - vii. The reality is found in the powers God gives each believer to resolve issues that even mature elders today cannot handle, because today we believe it is the powers of being ordained to the office of elder that gives you the special control of the keys of the kingdom of God.
  - viii. Today we are taught that the character traits of an elder are merely godly traits which adorn their power, the sugar that helps the medicine of their discipline and teaching go down.
  - ix. Paul makes clear that these “official organizational powers” are the illusion of power. Paul makes clear that their character (not the discipline they can mete out) is their actual power in the Holy Spirit to transform their congregation and overcome all opposition. He makes it clear by always appealing to their character in Christ, never to the power of their office. Does Paul attribute anything to office or any human characteristic of the follower or of the leader? Hmmmm, you could study the whole NT this way and answer that question. You can observe everything Christ commanded. You can disciple the nations.
  - x. And you discovered this by taking simple notes yourself. If you simply take my word for this, you will never personally know the power of God’s word to transform you. But when you read and take note, you will quickly forget you heard anything from me or anyone else. You will be overwhelmed by the power of the Holy Spirit speaking through the word and wonder how you could possibly have missed it, or why you spent so much time letting other people observe for you all that Christ has commanded.
2. Now, go to I & II Corinthians, while you eat and worship with your new friends and study where Paul is under the gun, doubted by an entire congregation, not even physically present with them so he can’t use any personal manipulation. Notice how all of the theoretical things he tells Timothy and Titus are the practical solutions to every one of the real-life problems in Corinth. Oh you do that by writing down all their problems and compare his solutions to how what tells Timothy and Titus to do. His power as an

apostle is his Character as a Christian, not his Apostolic anointing or “office” even though he is anointed and appointed and holds the office of Apostle, he does not use his abstract status to prove the truth of his word. His appeal is always to the work of the Holy Spirit in His life, in their life and God’s ability to solve their problems through obedient character, not by finding official leaders to do the work of the ministry and solve their problems. But if you take my word for it you will always be that bird in the nest satisfying yourself with someone else’s vomit.

- a. Don’t be satisfied with mine!
- b. You know how to study, figure out how and why Corinth could solve its problems with or without elders.
- c. Hint, The cookies AND the milk are both right down where anyone can reach, even the least esteemed among you.
- 3. Do it with Galatians, Ephesians, you will be surprised at how quickly you can learn to observe and disciple the nations.
- 4. You should have now 20 pages describing the Ephesians 4:11 sort of Christian who is not blown about by the winds of everyone’s opinions and yet is not dividing from everyone on every issue either.
- 5. If you are that sort of person, and people have gathered with you who are that sort of people searching the Scriptures for yourselves together, you are a non-authoritarian congregation. For you, self-government is not Utopian.
- 6. As a final introductory Bible Study, find out who does have final authority in the Church to judge.
  - a. This is perhaps the most important Bible study you can do together as a people, praying to understand what it means to be in communion.
  - b. Who has the final say in what you are to do and believe?
  - c. Who has the final say in what your wife or husband does and believes?
  - d. Who has the final say in what your new congregation does and believes?
  - e. What is the goal of freedom in Christ toward which you are raising your children with purpose and vision.
  - f. If you say God, or God’s word, you are correct. But who has the final say to decide what His word or His Holy Spirit says to you?
  - g. The reason it is character and not the “powers of the office” which effect lasting change, is because each Christian must stand or fall based on their own judgment as spiritual people who judge all things. Being the final

- court of appeal does not make you right, it makes you responsible, unable to blame your errors and sin on others.
- h. Answer: to find the powers of Christian self-Control go through all of the books you just studied all the lists you have made and ask this question of each point you jotted down — “What sort of person must I be to have the final say for myself, and yet unite with others (like my wife or husband) who will disagree on any number of points?”
  - i. Disunity is not an option, neither is unity with error. Only the mature can live in this tension, which is why only the mature are capable of the government outlined in this handbook and why only elders devoted to discipleship alone with no distractions who might bring such Christians to birth.
  - j. *“Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things — things that belong to salvation.”*<sup>232</sup>

G. Growth, it goes like this, don't make it complicated.<sup>233</sup>

- 1. If something is important to you it comes out in your contacts with other people.
  - a. Whatever does come out in these contacts is what is really important to you.
  - b. If you want to know what is important to you it is whatever you talk about when you're not paying much attention.
  - c. You will communicate whatever your life is full of.
- 2. If your needs are being met you will communicate this to people.
  - a. This cannot be faked you either have peace or you don't.
  - b. You either have an answer that is worth sharing or you don't.
  - c. You are either hanging out with a group of people that create something worth sharing or you don't
  - d. If your needs are not being met, you will share that too or you will be silent and not share anything or worse you will share the irrelevance of your soul.
- 3. As you talk with the people you meet, God will open doors for you to share the things you love — that is what social interaction is.
  - a. If you are in love;<sup>234</sup> and
  - b. experiencing Church as a community and family where you are one without being smothered by others or losing

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<sup>232</sup> Hebrews 6:9; Philippians 1:6.

<sup>233</sup> Matthew 12:34; Luke 6:45; Proverbs 10:11; Psalm 14:1.

<sup>234</sup> Revelation 2:4.

- your identity;<sup>235</sup> and
- c. If you are experiencing the reality of Ephesians 1 with people who make a difference in your life not to mention, II Corinthians 2-4 . . .
  - d. You're going to talk about it and invite people to meet your friends.
  - 4. If this isn't happening, you do what you did when you wanted to start the Church . . . you get on your face and talk to God about it, bringing up to him the people you meet.
    - a. It's God's problem, not yours. Keep bringing it to Him until He starts opening people up . . . or you up.
    - b. This is the ministry of prayer which is one half of the Ministry of an Elder.
  - 5. At some point the meeting room will get too small no matter how big the room is.
    - a. When that day comes divide everyone up. Approach this decision like all others. There will be people gravitating toward leadership and they will tend to divide with the group.
    - b. When all are in one accord . . . drive off.
    - c. Its OK. Nothing builds discipleship like discipling.
    - d. Nothing creates new leaders like new opportunities to lead.
    - e. There people who are really super-gifted and can address thousands. It is a real hunger and burning in their bones to do so. Is their light hidden under a bushel of these tiny congregations always dividing about the time they experience what the nations call success? Or will it kill a congregation and quench their light if they try to satisfy that craving? On the other hand, maybe social media could fill that gift and need without killing the gifted or the congregation with "success."

H. Evangelism. Tithing. Reaching out. feeding people<sup>236</sup> who

need to eat. In time you will reach the world.

- 1. Tithe the way Moses told Israel to in Deuteronomy 12 and 14. It is tailor made for the New Covenant ministry, worship and outreach.
- 2. Forget everything you thought you knew about the debate. Go read Moses on the tithe. "*You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to*

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<sup>235</sup> I Corinthians 12-13.

<sup>236</sup> John 21:17.

*make His name abide. . . . And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD Your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household. You shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you. At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.<sup>237</sup>*

- a. Tithing for Moses is a block party for the two week road trip it takes to get to the place where God's Name dwells, and the two weeks home, and a whole week partying while they are there.
  - b. No anemic passing of the offering plate here.
  - c. It's what you have been doing with your new Christian friends, sitting around eating, talking, making merry before the Lord with all your might<sup>238</sup> as you worship, apply Scripture and pray for your healing so you can be part of this Congregation.
  - d. So, who is missing from the picture? At least once in a while go find them and bring them in to eat with you. The poor, the Levite, the stranger within your gate the widow and orphan. (Especially invite the Levite, you know him as the local pastor down the street.)
  - e. Who gets the tithe? The tithe goes to where the name of the Lord dwells.<sup>239</sup>
- I. The primary growth of the Church corporately is through division, not through sending professionals to church plant.
1. Each part of the body is a church planter. Wherever someone goes they are the letter of commendation God is sending to whoever it is they are with. So, follow Paul's

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<sup>237</sup> Deuteronomy 14:21-29

<sup>238</sup> II Samuel 6:14, 21-23.

<sup>239</sup> I Corinthians 6:19; I Peter 2:5; Ephesians 2:21; I Corinthians 12:27. See also, **Axe to the Root** podcasts by Bojidar Marinov. His exegesis is worth listening to. <https://reconstructionistradio.com/tithing-responsibility-and-the-presence/>

- pattern.
2. You aren't starting a Church, you are just looking for people who want to be a part of a family.
    - a. Who respond to the Gospel meeting the deepest need in their life to be clean, known, understood, loved by God, cared about, engaged in meaningful work that is appreciated by others speaking into other people's lives.
    - b. Who respond to the other deepest need in their life — to be with real people who have found real answers but feel no need to bother others with them unless someone is open to talking.
    - c. Who is hungry, get them to start the same way you did and eat together. As they grow they will become people who do not need to run other people's lives with their homemade cookie cutters either, just like you don't.
    - d. Let them take the steps in Scripture as the Holy Spirit moves them to observe for themselves whatsoever Christ has commanded them.
  3. Visit with them regularly and worship, eat and hang out with them during their meeting.
    - a. Don't spend too much time with them,
    - b. It is not your Church or church plant, it's God's He is spending full time with them and wants to use you from time to time.
    - c. You'll see.
  4. When they fill up that place divide into two groups and so forth.
  5. Do not keep leaders who rise to the top pressed down by solving all their problems for them.
  6. Begin to meet with the leaders to teach them how discover for themselves that leadership is through service over time, not administrative decree or reading the right book.
    - a. It's not just a different set of rules or pecking order.
    - b. It's a real honest to God new pecker.
    - c. Never confuse the two one is like porn, vasectomies and contraception, it leads to sterility; the other to fruitful multiplication.
- J. Schism, Error, Sin, Rebellion, Pride? Of course you will deal with this. Let the congregation decide and each member decide what Scripture is saying, who and what is in and what is out if they can go with that decision. . . its OK. God's word sorts it out in the next 300 years.

1. These things tear everything up. They tore Paul up.<sup>240</sup> They are impossible to deal with. Good thing it's not your problem.
2. There is only one Schism or true split, it is over the belief that God's written word is final. It is still nothing to get upset over.
  - a. As long as His word is final everything else is a dispute that He promises to sort out in time,
  - b. Your Job is to move only in the confidence that he can sort it out, you don't have to.
  - c. Of course, you have to think, argue, debate, search the scriptures, but the resolution is not your job. "Study to show yourself approved a workman needing to be ashamed about nothing."
  - d. God is the architect and the policeman and His word will never return to Him void until it has accomplished his purpose.
  - e. God promises he will police his people. So all those verses about peacable, calm, loving, gentle mean there is nothing requiring your anger to resolve. It won't add a cubit to your height.
3. Keep the discussion going friendly and intense, it does matter, but no one needs to win the discussion everyone needs to think either outcome is something God can work with . . . so can you.
4. But if the day comes when the differences are irreconcilable This is the glory of letting God run the show
  - a. If he is in charge why are you bitter? Angry? Saying things that twist your soul far more than speaking truth to the situation.
  - b. Why are you drinking poison and hoping that your enemy dies?
  - c. Why do you cut your own testicles off thinking that will sterilize your opponent?
  - d. Why do you cut off your breasts because your Opponent is dry.
  - e. God drank that poison for both of you.
  - f. If you did your job discipling the congregation they will not be swept away, nor will the weak among them need your authoritarian protection or authoritarian decree to know what to do — there will be no weak to protect.

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<sup>240</sup> I Corinthians 4:9-13; II Corinthians 7:4-5; 10:12-11:43.

- g. God's got this even if you are the one who must walk out alone. If you are in the truth what better place is there to be? If you are not, what better way to wake you up?
5. If it is a doctrinal issue, when all are in one accord as to where the lines are drawn, you have a church division just like when the congregation got too big.
  - a. You pray for each other and one group or the other gets sent off with each side praying that the other will see the light.
  - b. Trust God. He will establish, correct or erase that congregation that you believe got it wrong.
  - c. What? Did you think it was all those counsels and persecutions that kept the Church pure?
  - d. If it was, where did the reformation come from? The Counter-reformation? The denominations? Where did all them come from?
  - e. Who believed Athanasius was right when he stood against the world?
  - f. Why couldn't they run John Chrysostom out of town?
  - g. Right, God has his people and even as poorly as we have done it throughout the millennia his word has not failed to purify and grow his people not through councils but because God knows those who are his.
6. If it's a critical doctrinal error, Trinity, Incarnation, etc.? Same process, only a warning from each side to the other (I also recommend a self-maledictory oath.) but the same send off with prayer. God will trash the error in the dustbin of history. You don't need authoritarian egotists to really mix it up. He knows those who are his.
7. Is it sin? Let the sinner be identified and he is sent off to start his own church around his sin or whatever he wants to do, the division is the same process just a much smaller send-off usually.
8. Is the problem pride? a leader who thinks this is an authoritarian Church and he is the authority or is somehow competing with another elder? Or it is his job to root out sin?
  - a. In time the same process clarifies who is with the leader and wants to return to the authorian congregation and who gets what is going on. So God bless them, send them off.<sup>241</sup>
  - b. And there you have it, a new congregation is formed.

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<sup>241</sup> Genesis 31:49.

- c. It is amazing when you keep the budget down to a bag and donations from people you can't control, and your ego committed to building up your brothers and sisters, the whole world turns into a footstool for the King.<sup>242</sup>
- 9. Oh did the congregation stop growing during this process . . . maybe you need to let God do the heavy lifting and know whether you walk out or they do its OK, you will keep the process of reaching out going as if nothing else is going on. And it isn't. Everywhere you go you are meeting people who will be starting congregations or joining yours.
  - a. If your controversy or church politics empties you so you are no longer full enough to slosh over or pour out on others then you need to go back to square one above — Prayer — it's half the ministry of the saints.
  - b. This resolving or failure to resolve issues has nothing to do with the various things which cause God's people to grow. If it does it must be addressed.
- K. Let it not be said of you, "*The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying, 'Go to this people and say, You will keep on hearing but will not understand; and you will keep on seeing but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, Otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.' Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Millennials; they will also listen.*"

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<sup>242</sup> Psalm 110:1,3. The Footstooling of the world begins with self-government.

## PART II – Appendixes and studies

Notice see Barista Essays in Logic for addenda taken out of the focus of this Handbook but relevant to it.

**When Children Walked the Earth** An Unpublished Book by Joseph L. Foreman on the nature and purpose of Authoritarian Government and the Creation order.

APPENDIX A — Summary Table of Contents a digest of argument of the Handbook.

APPENDIX B — Acts 15, I Corinthians 4:21 and I Corinthians 5 are not examples of the Authoritarian Conciliar function of NT elders, but rather Matthew 18:15-17 in practice.

APPENDIX C — The authority of the Angels — apparently the presiding elder — of the Church in Revelation 2-3.

APPENDIX D — Wycliffe's Vision Chapter 1 of Objections to Self Government. Argument for Progressive Sanctification in History

APPENDIX E — What we are Not Saying. Common misconceptions of government, power, anarchy, order, hierarchy which people assume can only be thought of one way. Example: No this is not egalitarian. Yes there is hierarchy, leaders, followers, first and last etc. No organizational power is not the only power. Government is not the balance between Tyranny and Anarchy. Etc.